

Can't Hide the Past

by Shadows

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Summary: 15 years after the third season, Buffy&Gang are back under weird circumstances

## 1. Default Chapter Title

It was a dark and stormy night.

><br>Outside, the rain pounded against the window in sheets, causing the panes to shake and rattle whenever the strong wind came a-wuthering around the house. Three o'clock in the morning, and the rain so clouded the street lamplight and the radiance of the stars that it was pitch-black outside for yards and yards, lightning providing the only luminance. Thunder was it's companion, booming all around the house, showing off that nature did have a damn good stereo system. Outside, trees and garbage cans were knocked over without much caution from the wind, and anybody stuck out in this storm was not to fare well.

><br>She was not outside. She was inside, staring outside the fogged-up wall window in the living room, watching the torrents of rain that pounded against her house with unseeing eyes. She was dressed in a ratty old shirt that said "I work for the Green Leaf CafÃ©" in big, bold green letters, and as she sat on the armrest of a rather expensive-looking leather couch, a pair of decorative purple panties were visible, along with luxuriously long legs. In her thin, lithe, trembling little hands was a warm mug of cocoa, quite a comfort to her throughout the night.

><br>Upstairs, in the master bedroom, her husband Jonah was fast asleep, probably shivering from the cold because he always kicked the bedsheets to the bottom of the bed, and he refused to wear anything else besides an amusing pair of flannel boxers. Down the hall, past the bathroom, the guest bedroom, and the utility closet, her daughter Elisabeth Sarah slept like the little angel that she was in the nursery. They still called it the nursery, she thought with a trace of humor, although "Es" had just turned six years old a month ago. It was still decorated like a child's room, also, and Jonah groaned the other day about Es reaching the age where \*she\* would want to decorate her own room. His wife shared his same fear.

><br>And, downstairs was her, she who could never get a decent

night's sleep. Yet, "you never get baggy eyes!", as one of her co-stars had once told her. She had just smiled at them and gave them her little secret-cucumbers, a hot bath, relaxing incense, and most importantly, "tons and tons of foundation!" Foundation, of course, was every actress's necessary tool in her line of work.

><br>Still, while that made it looked like she got plenty of sleep, her body still dragged miles behind. Or at least, it used to. Her body had been conditioned over the years to function without a lot of sleep. It came with both fields of work...both of them indeed, she thought with a sigh.

><br>There was a flash of lightning, and much too soon for comfort, a rumble of thunder pierced through the night. She jumped, and then made sure that none of the cocoa spilled out of the mug and into the ankle-deep, beige carpeting of the sunken living room. Tired of nature and tired of the world in general, she cradled the cup of cocoa to her chest and quickly, carefully made her way back to the kitchen through the entrance hall.

><br>When she entered the large, modern-age kitchen, the first thing she did was flip on the light switch. She blinked as her eyes became conditioned to the sudden change in lighting. Then, with a toss of her waist-length, wavy, dirty-blond hair, she made her way to the refrigerator.

><br>Binge-fest, in the middle of the night, and still she kept a good figure. Exercise, plenty of exercise, both officially with her personal trainer and unofficially chasing after her six-year-old, her brother-in-law, and the family dog. Not even counting her rigorous shooting schedule. It seemed that she never had an ounce of free time...never time to be herself. She was always either mother, wife, or actress.

><br>She was never Buffy.

><br>But now, during the late hours of the night and the wee hours of the morning, she could be herself. So, settling down at the kitchen table with her cup of cocoa, a slice of apple pie, and the latest issue of In Style, Buffy was content with being Buffy.

><br>On page 52 there was, not surprisingly, yet another article about her. It began with the usual line: "At only 32, Buffy Summers-Daly has become Hollywood's favorite darling" or some rot like that. Whenever one of those horrible reporter-persons came around, Buffy just usually rolled her eyes and made the few quotes and told some funny stories, just wanting to get the damn interview thing over with. In fact, she could only remember one article she had actually enjoyed doing. It was for one of those parenting magazines, and both she and Es were featured. That had been entertaining for the both of them, especially Es, who got to show off her collection of Beanie Babies to all of America.

><br>Her eyes were widening in shock as she read a certain paragraph that was not particularly flattering to a certain part of her body when she first heard the rapping. It was very soft: if not for her Slayer-strengthened hearing, she would never noticed it until five minutes later or so, when it became gradually louder until it was a thumping noise.

><br>More upset than spooked, Buffy got to her feet and marched out of the kitchen, up the winding marble steps that she had so loved when Jonah and she had first bought the mansion, and then into the hallway. There was a slight prickling at the back of her neck, a sensation that was associated with something that she \*definitely\* did not want it to be associated with.

><br>Tense now, Buffy stopped in front of the bookcase and pulled several books off the third shelf, where it was easiest to reach.

Behind them, hidden in the dust and darkness, were the standard issue supplies of a Slayer, or at least the barest minimums. Grabbing a stake and a tiny bottle of holy water, she pushed the books back into place and continued down the hall. She also asked God to keep Jonah in the bedroom, least he pop out to check out the racket during a critical moment. Thank God that he was such a deep sleeper; if he could sleep through that earthquake three or so years ago, he could damn well fall asleep through whatever she was gonna do.

><br>Buffy was certain that the rapping was coming from somewhere on the second floor, yet she couldn't place it. She stopped, toes digging into the hall rug, closing her eyes and concentrating heard, trying to place the location of the intruder. Vampire alright. She could sense the animalistic hunger, the lust, the need...she tried not to get caught up in the moment as she tried to pinpoint where the feelings were coming from.

><br>Suddenly her eyes flashed open. The feeling were coming from the last room down the hall...her daughters room! As the Slayer, Buffy felt no fear, no sense of panic or terror. But the mother inside her was feeling all those horribly twisted feelings and more, and the two halves of her conflicted sharply as Buffy hurried down the hall, bursting into her daughter's room.

><br>The room was such a sweet room. It was decorated in a soft lavender, Buffy's favorite color and not coincidentally, it had grown to be Es's also. There were stuffed animals, rocking chairs, toys, and a tiny television set strewn around the room and all around the center of the room, where the tall, large canopy bed lay in a place where a tiny crib had once been located. Buffy remembered shopping for the bed: Jonah and she had looked at their daughter as though she were insane, but Es had kept politely asking for the bed that she wanted. "She's having that bed 'till she moves out of the house," Jonah had said with all conviction as they had set it up together, marveling how the tiny the nursery had grown afterwards.

><br>Now, the curtains were pulled away from each other and tied to the bedpost, and she could see the tiny form of her daughter cuddled under the silk lavender covers, head buried in a pillow, and long brown hair spread all over like a halo. In her arms she clutched a raggedy stuffed pig: Mr. Gordo, which had once been Buffy's. And, as Buffy could tell and acknowledge with a great amount of relief, she was still breathing deeply; in fact, she was breathing and making soft snoring noises. The mother in Buffy reminded herself that she needed to take Es to the doctor and find out what the little girl was allergic to.

><br>Then the thumping sound came again. Elisabeth Sarah snorted and rolled over in her sleep, and Buffy the Vampire Slayer looked past the canopy bed and at the large window that had a wonderful view of acres of forest that were part of the Daly land.

><br>The only problem was that the breathtaking view was blocked by the large, burly form of a vampire, who was desperately trying to punch in the thick glass door. Buffy chuckled to herself.

><br>"Nine inches of glass, idiot. How are you going to get in?" she asked the moronic vampire, who of course had not noticed her yet. Feeling a little humorous and still with a slight high from the earlier shock of nerves, Buffy carefully crept up to window, staying tucked away in the shadows.

><br>When she was right underneath the window, Buffy reached up to grasp the window ledge with the hand that held the stake. The vampire still did not notice her. Good.

><br>Inside her head, Buffy gave a yelp. She quickly rose up, filling

the window with her form. The surprised look on the vampire's face was to die for, bad a pun as that was. The vampire, shocked, let go of the hold that he had on the window, and for a moment he just crouched there on the ledge, hands spinning and trying to keep his balance. Then, it's mouth twisted into an "O", the vampire lost balance and fell down two stories, landing on the grass with a \*thump\* that rang true in Buffy's mind.

><br>She allowed herself a little laugh. What is just her, or were vampires getting stupider and stupider as the years progressed? She turned around, holding the stake and the vial of holy water loosely in her hand, shaking her head with disgust. Really, it just was worth it most of the time...

><br>"Mommy? What's going on?"

><br>It was Buffy's turn to be startled now, so startled that she jumped just the tiniest bit before she realized that silky, young-sounding voice was coming from her daughter, who was now sitting up in bed with a sleepy demeanor about her. Buffy looked down at her hands, saw the weapons, and then quickly tucked them behind her, dropping them behind a large stuffed rabbit, hoping that she could get them in the morning before Es found them.

><br>"Nothing going on, sweetheart," Buffy soothed, walking over to her baby girl. She sat down next to her, pulling Es into her lap and holding her to her chest, smoothing her long, tangled brown hair that was the same length as her mother's. "Mommy was just looking out the window, that's all." She gave her a comforting kiss on the forehead and pulled back to look her daughter in the eye. "Now go back to sleep."

><br>"But I'm not tired," Es protested sleepily, opening her mouth in a little yawn. Then both mother and daughter giggled. "I guess I am," Es admitted, laying back down into her pillow. Buffy just smiled and tucked the covers tight around Es' body, then smoothing back her hair from her forehead.

><br>"Sweet dreams," Buffy whispered, slowly getting up. "I love you."

><br>"Love you too," Es breathed, already half asleep. In a few seconds, she was back to her steady breathing/wheezing. Buffy sighed tiredly and then walked out of the nursery, closing the door softly behind her. She stood in the hall for a moment, searching for the vampire's presence. He was still out there, somewhere in front of the house. Should she just go to sleep and pray that the vampire didn't harm somebody else? Or should she grab another stake from the false-bottom drawer in the master bedroom, the one that Jonah had no knowledge of?

><br>As good as dropping into bed besides her husband sounded right about now, Buffy could not ignore her duty. Sure, she could run away from being the Slayer, but it follow her until the day she died. At least things weren't too bad, and she should be grateful for that. Besides, if she didn't do something about that vampire...someone might get killed. Although many deaths were on her pretty little head already, Buffy didn't care to have one more added to the list. Dejectedly, Buffy reached for the hidden stash in her bookcase, pulling out just a stake this time. Swift and quick was the plan du jour.

><br>Just as she was placing the books back in place was when something strange happened. Well, it was not strange as in the sense of it happening-it was perfectly natural, mind you-but why would it choose to happen at that precise moment? Buffy's body went rigid as she felt the vampire suddenly \*not be there\*. He was totally gone-from this world at least. He had been slayed. But by whom?

><br>Buffy felt a slight bit of terror grip her heart again, but curiosity was the ruling emotion here. Hurrying down the stairs, Buffy ran to the door, intent on finding out what had happened to vampire, not at all afraid to fling the door open, because she had never invited a single vampire into this house.

><br>She was still stunned, though, at the figure that stood in her doorway, with the shiny black slicker, and completely drenched in rain, leather, and metallic jewelry. The shock must have been evident on her face, because her surprise visitor noticed and laughed.

><br>"That's not happy to see me," Faith Moss, the Vampire Slayer said as a bolt of lightning hit somewhere in the next street, raising the hair on the two women's necks and also illuminating her face eerily. "Afraid of the competition, eh?"

><br>Buffy's mouth suddenly did not work. Why, in fifteen years, did Faith suddenly appear on her doorstep. "What...?" she asked, her mouth hanging ajar at the not-so-quite end of the sentence.

><br>Faith smiled, her thin, very red lips parting just for a moment, then settling back into a thin line. "My last Watcher gave me an important bit of information. One of those pesky prophecies." She shook her arms, sending droplets of rain flying off from her coat. "You gonna let me in, or am I gonna catch pneumonia or what?"

><br>"Oh," Buffy said, somewhat sheepishly. Then she held the door open, and Faith marched past her as though she owned the place. "Make yourself at home," Buffy whispered softly as Faith hung her coat on the coat rack and then walked into the living room, plopping onto the coat and lifted her feet off the floor.

><br>Before closing the door, Buffy took one last look out the window, in case anymore surprise visitors popped up. Then, assured that there was to be no more, Buffy closed behind the door behind her. Surely, this was going to be one interesting night.

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><br>This time they were being very careful, very safe. The door was closed.

><br>Last time, which had definitely been only a short while ago, Julie and Josh had walked in on them. Definitely not mature for their age of five, the twins had set upon telling the entire tale in vivid detail to the dinner guests later that night, much to their parents' disgust and complete horror. After a long talk on the birds and the bees, Julie and Josh had agreed to keep quiet about the incident, although they had both agreed that this little thing was a wonderful blackmail. Yet, the opportunity to use it had not yet arisen. They would be quiet...they would wait.

><br>Meanwhile, their parents were being a little more cautious as to their surroundings when they "did it." Since the bedroom was always a major factor, with the bed being there and everything, and the walls were thick, there remained the fact that for the rest of the times that they had sex, the freakin' door would be closed.

><br>Of course, it did not matter how thick the walls were and if the door was closed and whether they were ten feet or ten million miles away from the twins' bedroom. Nothing in the known universe could muffle Cordelia's screams of ecstasy.

><br>She, of course, was done with the screaming part now. They were nearing the end part, and Cordelia was quite comfortable with being silent and letting her husband do his thing under the covers.

><br>"Hmm, yes, that's the right spot," she murmured contently as her talented spouse touched her in just the right place. A sob of enjoyment was caught in her throat as she kept herself in check. "Oh...yeah."

><br>She was just sneaking under the covers to pleasure her husband a bit when the phone on the nightstand let out it's annoying, piercing ring. Rolling her eyes, Cordelia climbed out of her "position" and reached for the phone.

><br>"Hello, you've reached the Harris residence," Cordelia said cordially into the phone, realizing how much she sounded like a secretary. "This is Cordelia. May I please ask the name of whoever is suicidal enough to be calling me at-" she reached out one long, bare arm to turn the digital clock to face her-"six o'clock in the freakin' morning?" She ended the sentence in a honeyed tone, trying to sound as sardonically polite as she could be.

><br>"Um, hello Cordelia," said a pleasant male voice, sounding as tired as Cordelia sounded pissed. "This is Jack. Can I please speak to Xander, if he's there?"

><br>"Oh, he's here alright," Cordelia said icily into the phone. Next to her, Xander popped his head out of the covers, his hair mussed and his face flushed. "Unfortunately, Roger, he's busy right now." Xander tapped her on the shoulder, and she turned to look at him with narrowed eyes. He made a big "no" sign and then held out his hand for the phone.

><br>"Never mind, here he is," Cordelia grumbled into the phone, begrudgingly handing the phone over to her husband. "Obviously, you've got your priorities crossed," she mumbled crossly, ducking under the covers. Xander just sighed and turned his attention to the phone.

><br>"So Jack, what about that ca-" Xander stopped mid-word, sucking his breath in sharply. He closed his eyes, his lips curving upwards into a smile, which quickly grew to a frown. He cupped on large hand over the receiver, and then whispered harshly, "Cordelia, not \*now\*!"

><br>All he got in response was a muffled giggled, and more of what she had begun to do. "Roger, ah...I'm gonna have to call you back," he managed to get out, and then slammed the phone back into his handle. "Are you trying to embarrass me in front of my co-worker?" Xander said teasingly, sliding back under the covers to that he could further enjoy this special attention.

><br>Mid attention-giving, there was a sudden crash from outside. Two tousled heads popped out, both very upset and one slightly paranoid.

><br>"I think that came from the shed," Cordelia said in a tiny voice, looking around the bedroom. Her eyes landed on the door, then they flicked to Xander, and then back to the door. "Ahem," she said, clearing her throat loudly.

><br>Xander groaned, and then sat up. "Where are my boxers?" he said, looking frantically around for his under-shorts. Spotting them a good toss away from the bed, he climbed out of bed naked, only then realizing how damn cold it was in the small bedroom. "I wish you didn't have such a good arm," he chuckled, remembering just how far she had tossed in his clothes 30 or so minutes ago.

><br>"Oh, you \*like\* my good arm," Cordelia said teasingly, sitting up in bed also. She wrapped the covers around her upper and lower body, even though she was very comfortable displaying her body in front of Xander. "You so know you do."

><br>"Of course I do," Xander said, pulling up his boxers. He picked up his undershirt from the back on the desk chair and pulled his on over his head. With a smile, he reached behind the computer monitor

that rested on his desk and took a long while in pulling out a black, lacey bra. "Is this yours, Mrs. Harris?" he asked, dangling it in the air and wiggling his eyebrows at his wife.

><br>Cordelia laughed, a lilting sound that sounded like music to Xander's ears. The words {I can't believe she's my wife} flashed through his mind a million times, even though she had been his wife for a good four years now. Every time he looked at her body, every time that she spoke aloud, and every time that he looked into her eyes, those exact words ran through his mind. He just couldn't believe his amazing luck. {You're blessed, Harris} he told himself, believing every word he thought.

><br>"Yes, it's mine," she said sultrily, letting her eyelids half-close over her eyes as she continued staring steadily at him. When she did that it always turned him on, and they both knew it. "But you can keep it for a souvenir, if you like."

><br>"Hmm, I'd like that a lot," Xander said, and he stuffed the bra into the back pocket of his boxers, making sure that a bit peeked through. "Now, while I be the man and check on whatever raccoon happened to take shelter in our shed, don't go anywhere, ok? I learned something new that I'd like to show you." His voice clearly hinted at something.

><br>"Yeah, and I'd be even more interested in who you learned it from!" Cordelia called after her husband as he closed the bedroom door behind him. She could hear his laughter, the soft laughter that always sent shivers up her spine. {You don't deserve him at all} Cordelia thought to herself, laying back down in the bed and patting her pillow. {Or, you do deserve him, and you've finally got him}. That thought made her grin.

><br>Only four years ago she was in the hospital, deep in a coma she had been brought into from the severe beating her first husband, Jonathan Peters, had given her earlier that evening. She could still remember his angry voice, the sound of his baseball bat crunching her bones, and their child, Nicholas, who was only three or four years old at the time, screaming for Daddy not to hurt Mommy-yes, she still remembered that horrible night. And then, the next day, she was lying in a hospital bed, totally unconscious.

><br>She had lied there for two straight weeks, completely alone and unable to tell her story-she wouldn't, anyway, because she was the classic beaten wife case, totally unable to admit that anything was wrong with her marriage. Jonathan was off doing computer programming in Asia and totally refused to come back to L.A., which was becoming mighty suspicious for the social service workers that hung out on the fourth floor. Poor Nicholas, who they might have extracted information from, was completely in shock. He refused to speak, and he didn't regain his speech until an entire year later. Even now he was still a shy and quiet boy, with a dark and brooding expression, and brown eyes that were much too old for a seven-year-old.

><br>When she finally came out of the coma, two weeks after she was admitted to the hospital, she had extreme amnesia, only able to remember two words: "Alexander Harris." These two words brought such mixed feelings, such as anger, hate, betrayal, but strongest of all, an intense feeling of love, of actually feeling that he completed her. Not a face, not a recollection as to where these feelings came from were available to Cordelia.

><br>Then a lucky break came. The nurse who take care of her, a kind woman somewhere in her late forties, named Celeste, recognized the name. It seems that a man by the same name had checked in to the hospital, asking for a nurse to take care of his twin newborns while he spent his time here in L.A. Celeste's friend, Maggie, had been

chosen for the job, and she could get this Alexander Harris to show up. If he recognized her, they could continue getting her memory back, because although there were picture and evidence of her present, any and all before her marriage to Jonathan was a complete blank to her and everyone else.

><br>The next day, Alexander Harris showed up. Cordelia still remembered the first time she saw him, standing in the doorway, such a sad, depressed face on. Then, when he saw her: bandages, crutches by her bed side, bruised all over the place, his face had dropped into one of complete shock and sympathy. He had sat by her hospital bed, demanding to know who had done this to her so that he could give whoever it was a damn good thrashing. Cordelia didn't answer him, but instead wondered why this man, this strange man with the gorgeous face, great build, and light British accent felt the need to protect her so.

><br>Least to say, the following week was a week of immense learning, and Cordelia gained her memory quite quickly, though it was mostly from actually banging her head on the side of her hospital bed than the fine-toothed experiments most of the doctors and Xander had made her through.

><br>The first thing she did was freak out because the things that Xander had been telling her about her past was indeed true. The second thing she did was report the still-away-on-business Jonathan to the authorities and demand a divorce and also a restraining order. The third thing she did was ask Xander if he would consider a relationship, taking in consideration what had only recently happened in England. Xander had agreed nonetheless, and in less than six months or so they wed, and nine months later their daughter, \*their\* daughter Annie was born. They were a family, now and forever.

><br>And, as Cordelia waited for Xander to return, she thought he was a mighty fine act in bed, too.

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><br>The air was chilly, mainly because it was December and it was Connecticut, and Xander knew that he just asking for a cold, going outdoors in his kind of clothing. But all he had to do was take a quick look in the shed, run the stupid raccoon out, and then go back up to the bedroom again. Simple, really, and if he did it fast enough, he wouldn't have to down a bottle of Triaminic afterwards. Honestly, Cordelia had the strangest way of avoiding colds. But at least the Triaminic tasted rather well, for medicine.

><br>The sun was just peeking over the horizon, and Xander was overtaken by the sudden fear that he would have to go to work soon. Then he calmed down, reminding himself that it was Saturday and they were letting him take the weekend off. Thank God, too. Xander planned on taking the kids camping, even Cordelia and Annie, though they would have to deal with taking care of a three-year-old. Luckily, Annie was turning out to be much of a tomboy, like Julie had turned out to be. There would be no misgivings while Xander, Nicholas, Josh, and Julie went out trekking in the woods, although Cordelia would most likely stay inside the tent, mothering Annie to death. She meant well, anyway...

><br>Xander reached out to pull the shed doors open, and he grunted in surprise when they didn't open. He put his feet in the ground and then pulled hard on the doors, and still they did not swing open. Dammit, he was a big man, and he tons of muscles from working out, and he was very, very strong. So why weren't the doors opening? They opened fine yesterday; they couldn't possibly rust shut overnight.



><br>For a second, Xander wondered if something other than raccoons were his shed, but he was no longer someone who was content to just wonder. He went to the back of the shed where a few shovels were lying around, and praying Cordelia didn't come out screaming "Xander! What are you doing to the shed?!", he went back to the front and began to pound on the front doors.

><br>When he heard the satisfying \*clang\* of the lock being broken inside, he shoved the doors open, and the rosy pink light of the sunrise flooded the shed. Something moved along a pile of some unnamable metal parts, and Xander was quick enough to see that it was indeed a raccoon. "Oh, get the hell out of here," Xander grumbled, throwing the shovel at the metal parts, careful not to hit the animal. He did succeed in scaring it, though, and the mammal quickly scampered past Xander, running out of the shed like it was crazed. The strange behavior puzzled Xander; that and the fact that something seemed so \*wrong\*. It was just in the air.

><br>Cautiously, Xander entered the shed, walking all the way to the back, where the sunrise's light did not shine. He looked around, but he saw nothing. Suddenly, something skittered up the back wall, and Xander stepped back and looked up high, sighing when he realized it was just a lizard.

><br>"See, nothing," he told himself, crossing his arms over his chest. "Some imagination."

><br>He was totally caught off guard when something did indeed grab him from behind and pulled him up against the wall. Startled, Xander gathered himself as his attacker grabbed a good hold of his neck. Squirming out of his attacker's strong grip, he fell to the floor and quickly rolled under some old mats. Whoever jumped on top of the map, but Xander rolled back out just in time. He got to his feet while the attacker was still rolling around, still tangled up. Xander laughed and grabbed the person by the back, intent on punching the lights out of this asshole.

><br>How surprised-how very surprised-was he when he looked into the horrible, misshapen face of his attacker. A forehead creased together in a ridge down the center, horrible yellow eyes as though it had hepatitis, and a mouth full of big, sharp, teeth, and a pair of long, elongated...fangs.

><br>"Oh \*shit\*." Xander said aloud, and the vampire, seeing that Xander was momentarily stunned, took the chance to try punching him out. He knocked Xander to the floor again, and then proceeded to get on top of him, heading right for his neck, growling with intense hunger.

><br>Xander, realizing just what the heck was gonna happen here, grabbed the vampire by the neck and threw him off. All those years of physical therapy and self defense weren't for nothing...Xander flipped over unto his back and quickly glanced around the shed, and finding what he wanted, grabbed it off a shelf. The vampire, with his back to him, tried turning around to capture his intended victim, but Xander was armed with the handle of a broken hammer. In a rage, Xander shoved it right through the vampire's heart, staring in disbelief as it disappeared into dust. Then he let the handle clatter to the floor.

><br>"Oh \*shit\*," he repeated, walking backwards out of the shed. He closed the door quickly behind him, and then lay against the doors for support. A vampire, in the daylight, in \*his\* shed, intent on making him his breakfast-or dinner. Why, after 15 years of being left alone, did they choose to bother him now...

><br>Well, if they were in his shed they were probably damn well everywhere. Xander looked around him in a controlled panic, and then

ran towards the house, not caring what the neighbors or the children thought. "Cordelia!" he yelled loudly as soon as he entered the house and the front door banged behind him. "Get down here quick! We need to talk!"

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><br>"Ok, now listen to this, alright? Here goes..."

><br>Willow Osbourne sat up on one of the couch cushions that had been thrown on the hardwood floor for comfort. Her legs were cross-legged like Buddha, her hair, which reached down to her ankles when she stood up, was sprawled all over the floor, and in her beautiful manicured hands was a small cup of herbal tea.

><br>She wore a pair of loose-fitting, ragged old Levi's that once were her husbands, back when they fit him. He had grown quite a bit since he had bought these pants, so now they were Willow's. Her top was a loose-fitting, copper, velvety thing with a dangerously low neckline. A beautiful choker with a silver half-moon hanging from a ribbon beautifully accented her pale, elegant neck. Her hair, thick and dangerously wavy and colored "Terra Cotta Shocked", hung over in her eyes and she bent forwards, scribbling furiously in a notebook.

><br>She rocked back and forth to an imaginary rhythm, never taking her eyes off the paper and writing with more and more ferocity as she neared the bottom of the page. Then, with a little exclamation of triumph, she dotted her last period and then jumped up, the couch cushion swaying dangerously. "Done! I think I got it!" she exclaimed excitedly, shaking with joy. Then she cleared her throat and opened her mouth, and out came these words:

><br>"Out of the shadows you appear

>When I'm in need of help and to rid me of fear<br>You are my angel, you are my soul

>And it's the love we share that makes me whole.<br>

>If this is love, this is strange<br>I've only seen you once and I don't know your name

>Lost in your eyes, in your deep mournful stare<br>It's dangerous to love you but I don't care."

><br>Then, done singing her little diddy, she sat back down on the cushion, crossed her legs, and waited for the response.

><br>Before her sat her husband, a fellow coven member, and an ex-boyfriend. Also known as Jeremy "Oz" Osbourne, Adriana "Echo" Ruben-Brown, and Devon Brown. Also, to most of America, they were known as the extremely popular and successful alternative music band, "Hellmouth."

><br>"I thought that was really good. I like the lyrics, but the music could be worked on," Oz offered after a long pause for careful consideration. He was wearing an old checkered jacket over one of his many bowling shirts, this one a cheerful light blue that said "New York City" in script above the left pocket. He wore a pair of brand new khaki's that Willow had gotten him for his birthday. His hair was its regular brown this month, but if Willow was going to the supermarket like she said she was, it wouldn't stay this shade for long.

><br>"Where's the rest of the song?" Echo asked abruptly. She wore a tight black shirt that had a gorgeous silk-screened rose on the front, and on the back the words "White Rose Coven" were scripted, along with the name "Echo." As for the lower part of her, she had on a skirt with a dangerous slit down the side, which had been caused when Echo had caught it on the side of the door and ripped it. Her

shaggy black hair framed her pale china face and her delicate feature, and ended somewhere below her shoulder blades.

><br>Everyone gave her an exasperated look. "What, I want to know!" When nobody else said anything and just glared at her, she scowled a little and shrunk back into her seat on the couch. "Oh, what do you expect," she grumbled, "I'm just the drummer."

><br>Next to her, her husband Devon shifted in his seat and shifted the position of his arm, which rested on Echo's shoulders. He was wearing an old, faded t-shirt that had a picture of a skater dude, and baggy blue jeans. His brown hair was in a style reminiscent of Ben Affleck when he was young. "I really, really liked the lyrics, and I have a suggestion for the music...more of an uppity thing, instead of so mellow."

><br>"Ok," Willow said cheerfully, wanting as much feedback as she could get. She was absolutely dying to get a new record out, especially after the success of their first two albums, and as the songwriter of the group, she had to make some big contributions. Like writing the songs themselves.

><br>"I also have the chorus part down already, but I don't like how it goes right after this certain paragraph. But I'm thinking, if I think of another paragraph, then maybe it'll fit..."

><br>The whole band dove right into the song, adding their own lyrics although it was Willow's job, adding percussion although that was Echo's job, and the boys remained pretty true to them making the decisions about the guitar. Echo, though, was all for the electronica part of the song. She loved working with the keyboard, and making all sorts of weird music and noises to use in the song.

><br>The whole team was really involved in the process when there was the sound of glass breaking from outside. They all lifted their heads up, Oz and Willow exchanging looked. Oz's ears twitched back, extremely unnatural for a human, and then concentrated as though he was listening to something far away. Echo and Devon turned to watch him carefully: he was the best bodyguard, what with the ability to tune into his wolf senses whenever he liked.

><br>"There's someone outside and..." Oz shivered, and that fact was clearly visible to the other members of the band. "I actually think it's...something."

><br>"Oh darn, I'll get the supplies," Echo groaned, getting up off her arse and walking over to the little kitchen they had going in this apartment. She reached up for the top cabinet and opened it, starting to pull out all the ancient Christian relics. "Really, Willow, I remember you scaring MoonRaven so bad when she opened this cabinet," Echo chuckled, remembering a certain episode when their coven leader had come to visit the apartment. "I can just see the expression on her face. 'I thought you were \*Jewish\* and Wiccan, child! Not three whole religions! How do you split your time so?\*' Hmm. Quite memorable."

><br>"Yeah, well, I'm not surprised if she buys the whole 'it's to ward off vampires' thing," Devon said wryly to Willow. "She took it pretty well when you broke the news about you and Oz being werewolves and all."

><br>"Well, she did tell me she was a witch," Willow said, shrugging. "I say fair and fair."

><br>Oz was slowly walking towards to the door, his ears still contorted forwards. Any person that was not used to seeing them like that would definitely be sick to their stomach. "Gimme a stake," he murmured, finally arriving at the door.

><br>"Here." Echo closed the cabinet and tossed out some wooden stakes, teeny nail-polish bottles of holy water, and crosses to the

three other people in the apartment. Then Willow, Devon, and Echo came up behind Oz, armed and ready.

><br>Ever since Oz and Willow had left Sunnydale behind, the vampires and other supernatural forces (not counting Willow's interest in the Craft) had never bothered them. When they had moved down here to Old World Mexico, however, evil still pretty much had somewhat of a reign over here, stepped in ancient traditions. After telling Echo and Devon (heck, they had taken tons of the truth in, already) the four had gone out, bought the supplies, and generally knew what to do. It also helped that Oz was able to tap into his werewolf aspect at any time, Willow and Echo were trained in all aspects of being Wiccan, and Devon having a black belt in Tae Kwon Do. They were pretty much prepared for anything.

><br>"It's by the fountain," Echo noted, sensing the empty pocket in the energy that flowed all around the small apartment complex in Southern Mexico. Willow nodded in affirmation, feeling the emptiness also. No doubt that Oz sensed it, for dogs and cats had always been able to spot the paranormal. Once, Willow and Echo had to perform an exorcism of the house because Oz was being driven nuts by a ghost living in one of the pasts apartments they had rented.

><br>"I'll take your word it," Devon said as he looked out the window, pushing the vertical blinds out of the way so that he could see somewhat clearly. "I really can't tell anything in this dark. It looks like no one is there."

><br>"Well, no one isn't there," Echo said, matching Devon's earlier tone of wryness. "Some\*thing\* is there."

><br>"Give you that," Devon admitted, shrugging.

><br>Oz opened the door and the four of them stepped out, Oz immediately changing his eyes into the werewolf form so that he could see better in the dark. "It's there alright," he admitted, feeling his hair standing up straight on end. "Who wants to get it?"

><br>Willow was about to open her mind to call her dibs on slaying the intruding vamp when a shadow dropped from atop the porch roof and landed straight on Oz, knocking him over the banister and sending him flying three stories down to the fountain, where the other vampire waited.

><br>"OZ!" Willow shrieked, turning to the wrought-iron stairs and quickly running down the winding steps, tightening her hold on her stake and ignoring the pain as her feet pounded against the metal. In a few seconds she had made it to the first floor, and she quickly hurried across the square to the fountain, barely registering the fact that Echo and Devon were right at her heels.

><br>Oz was not stupid-no human being could survive behind thrown three stories down into the unforgiving earth. But his werewolf form could at least recover quickly, and the only misgiving that he had was that he had really messed up his shirt. He quickly morphed in mid-air, silently thanking Willow's friend SilverDragon, who had so meticulously shown him how to change from werewolf to human in just an instant. It had felt rather...good, to know that there were others like him, others who also had to live like he and Willow did.

><br>Anyway, back to the point. The vampire was extremely surprised that when they reached the ground, he held in his clutches not a somewhat scrawny human, but a big, strong, and angry lycanthrope. The vampire released his grip and tried to jump off the werewolf, but Oz wasn't about to let this guy go. As the vampire crawled away, Oz jumped on his back and slashed it open with his paw, causing the vampire to let out a cry in agony.

><br>In the building across the square, a light flicked on. A woman

came to the window and tossed it open, noticing the commotion outside. Sigh, another vampire. Since this part of Mexico was still very rural, they were very much into the old beliefs, and this woman, like most of the others around these parts, knew of the existence of ancient evils. This woman was not scared. All she did was take the cross that was hanging over her bed and place it on the window, and then picked up the phone to call her aunt that lived across the street, in the apartment above the one where the werewolves/witches lived. Then she went back to sleep, not afraid at all, knowing that whatever vampire stupid enough to attack anyone in these parts would soon be annihilated by the nice people who had moved in a few months ago.

><br>Devon and Echo, what with their experiences in Chinese/Japanese fighting, set to beating the pulp out of the vampire by the fountain, not staking it until it cried for mercy. Willow just sat by the edge of the fountain, waiting for Oz to do his stuff.

><br>Now that the vampire was in some pain and not up to his full strength, Oz changed back into something resembling more human. He rolled away from the vampire, and then grabbed him by the shoulders. The vampire growled with ferocity, and then kicked Oz hard in the shin. Oz winced, but he just lifted the vampire off from the floor and flung over to where Willow was. Willow smiled and pushed the vampire face-first into the water, instantly setting off smoke. The vampire squealed and screamed as she plunged him fully into the deep, watching him writhe and cry out with pain. Not for nothing had she and Echo blessed all the water in this fountain.

><br>Oz came up behind her, gathering the bits of clothing that still hung off of him around the places that needed most to be covered. Echo and Devon, done torturing their vampire, gathered around Willow. None of them made any move as to pull the vampire out of the blazing water, Willow and Oz stared with grim satisfaction as the vampire screamed for a mercy, and Willow felt extreme pleasure at seeing such an evil being suffering so. It deserved it.

><br>"Ok, we can kill it now," she announced, crossing her arms over her chest. She was content enough already.

><br>Oz made no move whatsoever, because his human self was still healing. Devon, stronger than Willow or Echo, reached out and pulled the vampire, who's skin had turn black and smelled faintly like a building did after it had been incinerated by a house fire. He easily shoved a stake right into the heart, and then he was left clutching at dust and air.

><br>They were silent for a moment, collecting their thoughts. Then Echo shifted the weight on her feet. She was tired.

><br>"G'night," she told the rest of the group, heading back towards the stairs. "We can work on the song tomorrow. Ok?"

><br>The rest of the group shrugged.

## 2. Default Chapter Title

As 17-year-old Willow Rosenberg sat in front of the computer in the library, she thought to herself {Love really does make you do the wacky}.

><br>It had started out as a stupid clothes fluke-as least, that's what she and Xander had thought. It was just the rush of him seeing her in a dress and her seeing him in a tux-they had never seen each other like that before, and they had been taken by surprise. I mean, they had been best friends forever, and seeing each other look so...different, had come quite as a shock to their raging & changing

hormones. The whole thing was just an accident that would happen only once.

><br>Or so they had thought. They had continued to meet, to touch, to kiss...and at least Willow was feeling overwhelmingly guilty because she was doing all of this behind Oz's back. She had no idea what Xander was thinking, or not thinking, about Cordelia's feelings. All she knew was that she felt this amazing love and compassion for Oz, and what she felt for Xander was-well, even now, weeks after it had happened, she had still no idea about what exactly \*had\* happened. Her emotions were...aarggh! She couldn't even think of a word for what she was feeling for Xander.

><br>Lust...need...want...passion...?

><br>Was that what Xander had with Cordelia? Was that what Xander had first had for Cordelia, before it blossomed into some kind of strange and twisted like (love?)? Would Willow and Xander, if they had a relationship, turn out like Cordelia and Xander did? And what about Oz...

><br>Oh, they couldn't have kept up the charade anyhow. Sooner or later somebody would have figure out what was going on. But did it have to be such a spectacular finish? Jeez, what did the Hellmouth's rays \*not\* effect in their lives? And poor Cordelia had suffered the worst...imagine being impaled like that. Willow shuddered.

><br>For some reason, out of sheer luck, she had gotten back with Oz. Of course, things didn't turn out as planned for the night...they had turned out better. She still had her virginity and self respect, and Oz thrown in for good measure. But now things were \*so damn awkward\* that she had no idea how she was gonna deal.

><br>Things were not back to being perfect, before...that thing with Xander. Oz was with her alright, but the look in his eyes...she didn't have to look too deep or far to see the pained expression of hurt and betrayal whenever he looked at her. Or the way that he was so stiff and a little bit more quiet than usual. Or how he smiled more often like he was only smiling for show. And how he didn't touch her as much. Or he had yet to say the words that she had held so dear..."I love you."

><br>And she didn't even want to think about what was going on between her and Xander. After she and Oz had broken up, and Cordelia and him were no longer an item, they had remained friends, although things had been SO majorly awkward. And now that she was back together with Oz...

><br>Her mother had given her odd looks, but she agreed to tell Xander whenever he called that Willow was not home, or in the shower, or studying, or out with Oz. Those were reasonable activities. Whenever Xander came knocking on her door, she ignored the knocking until he went away, or told her parents not to answer the door. She ignored Xander at schools, ate lunch solely with Oz, and pretended he didn't exist in the classes they had together. Xander had tried to confront her about this avoiding, but she had just shrugged him off, practically running down the hall to get away from him. When Buffy was brought up to talk to Willow, Willow had told her that everything was fine, and that she was just going through a "healing process," although that was a bunch of shit because it was she who had inflicted the pain, not received it.

><br>Now she allowed herself in the library, confident that Xander was not coming because he said he had a dentist appointment. She had thought that was strange, because he already had had the "two-a-year" thing happen, but he ate so much junk food she was not at all surprised that he had to go to the dentist's more often. It was...a

normal thing.

><br>Giles was in his office, going over a new shipment that a Watcher friend of his had sent him from somewhere in Switzerland, from a town whose name Willow could not pronounce if it depended on her life. She was busy in a chat room, talking with other teens who were facing relationship problems...probably not as weird or twisted as hers, but she felt a strange kind of solace in seeing that other people were somewhat as screwed in the love department as she was.

><br>She was busy typing her sympathy for a boy named Tim when she heard someone come up behind her. "Interesting book, Giles?" she murmured, not taking her attention off of the computer screen.

><br>"No, not Giles. Me, Xander."

><br>Willow was so surprised that she slammed her fingers down into the keyboard, hard enough so that she felt the pain minutes afterwards. She jumped out of the chair like it was on fire, and then backed away from the computer, pushing her shoulder-length red hair behind her ears. Then she just stood around, staring warily at Xander, and trying not to show it.

><br>"Um, so, Xander...I thought you went to the doctor-uh, dentist! The dentist, yeah." She was wringing her hands nervously and flicking her eyes towards the front door.

><br>"I lied," Xander said, simply and clearly. He rested his hand on the chair Willow had just evacuated. "I need to talk to you." His face and voice changed to one of hurt. "Why are you avoiding me?"

><br>Willow bit her lip. "Um, ah, well...you know what happened. Between us. Yes, you know. You were there." She took in a deep breath. "What I, you, we, us, did...we hurt a lot of people. And I hurt Oz. And now I have him back and...I don't want him to get any ideas, or anything. Like I told you before...I need to be just for him."

><br>Xander creased his eyebrows. "So...that means you can't talk to me. That means that you constantly have to avoid me. That you can barely be in the same \*room\* with me? Do you think I'm gonna just go ahead and jump your bones or something? Because I'm not thinking about that anymore, Willow. What we did...we did, and it's over." Willow opened her mouth to protest, but Xander just continued on and didn't give her a chance to speak. "So then where is he gonna get these ideas. Unless you are...look, I know that there's after effects. Of course there is. And I understand that now that you have Oz back, it's going to be a little more awkward. But \*this\*? Willow, we've been best friends since forever, and although this changes a lot, it certainly can't change \*everything\*. Everything doesn't have to change."

><br>Willow face softened. "Xander, you don't understand. Everything does change..."

><br>There was the sound of someone clearing their voice from behind Xander. Xander turned around while Willow stood up on tiptoe to glance over his shoulder. It was Giles, holding several books in his hands.

><br>"Am I interrupting...anything?" Giles asked, saying each word slowly and carefully.

><br>"No!" Willow said too soon and too loudly. She cleared her throat and looked down at the books in his hands. "Um, interesting books?" Her voice squeaked.

><br>"Um...yes, quite." He piled the books near at the computer, bristling at actually being so close to the idiot box. "Ancient books of prophetic lore. Actually, most of these texts are a bit

outdated, and most of its prophecies have already come to past. Still, there are some that have yet to be fulfilled..." He picked the top most book up, opened it, then scooted a little past Xander to hand Willow the book. "I would like you to look through some of these books, Willow, if you have time. And Xander,"-Giles briefly shot him a look-"since you are here anyway, could you help Willow look through some of these texts?"

><br>"Sure," Xander said, sounded as enthusiastic as he always did about doing research. Giles just nodded and handed him a book, and then disappeared back into his office.

><br>Xander sighed, and then looked at Willow, who was avoiding his glance. He sighed again, and then his eyes fell onto the computer screen.

><br>"Relationship Problems?" he inquired about the chat. Willow's eyes widened expressively and she lurched forward, shutting the monitor off.

><br>"Nothing," she said meekly, very, very embarrassed.

><br>Xander as about to say something when somebody else made their entrance. The original Slayerette turned towards the double doors to greet their new visitor.

><br>"Hi Buffy! You came just in time for research!" Xander said cheerfully, far from the actual emotion that he was feeling. Just because he wasn't getting along with Cordelia or Willow didn't mean that he had to take I out on Buffy. Dammit, he had one girl friend left, and he was gonna take care of her.

><br>"Goody for me," Buffy said with her usual wryness. "Where's Giles? I need to talk to him."

><br>"Right here." Giles appeared out of his door again, looking around the library as though he were searching for something along the walls. "What is it?" he asked, giving her his attention.

><br>"It's about...a dream I had last night," Buffy said, a thought flashing through her mind. Oh, the last dream that she had had been her with Angel, with them making love...she didn't permit herself to think of the end part of the dream at all. "Um, it was pretty weird, so I figured that was right up your alley. No?"

><br>"Oh, yes, well, come right into the office," he said, glancing over at Willow and Xander. They turned back to their books, Xander flipping just too earnestly to actually mean it. Willow shot him a look when he wasn't looking, thinking about the conversation they had just had. Everything did have to change.

><br>Muffled voices came from the office, but Xander ignored them as he squinted at a word on the page before him. "Hey, this may be just because I'm really hungry, but does this word say "taco?" The text he pointed to was written in some ancient language.

><br>Willow took a moment to decided whether she was going to pay attention to him or not, and then decided she was. She peered over his arm and at the book, noticing that it did say taco. Then she looked at the bottom of the page, where a key was that more or less told you how to pronounce the language, if not tell you what it means. "It does say taco, but the key says that the 'o' is pronounced like the vowel 'u' in this language. So it's really saying 'tacu' instead of 'taco.'"

><br>"Oh," Xander said, shrugging. Willow went back to her page as Xander continued studying the page.

><br>When she turned around again, she could see him whispering some of the words on the page softly. "Don't do that!" she said suddenly, slapping his hand. He looked up at her, startled. "For all you know, you could be reading a spell! That you do not know what it does! Read



in your head!"

><br>{Fine} Xander thought, a little bit tensely. All week she acts like a bitch (well, kinda) and now that they were talking again, she was being harsh. "Fine," he said aloud, turning back to the book and reading loudly in his head.

><br>Of course, what Xander didn't know and what Willow \*should've\* known that even a spell read loudly in the head of the spellcaster, willingly or unknowingly, still pretty much damn worked.

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><br>"So...I was standing at the foot of my bed, staring down at me. I was sleeping really soundly, and at first I thought I was having one of those out-of-body experience thingies, but then I noticed that something was wrong. I was staring at myself in the face, and my body was lying down on the bed, so I was pretty short. Mom just put in a floor-length mirror, so I rushed over there to check out what had happened to me. And what stared \*back\* at me was a little girl, about six or so years old. She had long brown hair and these really dark green eyes, like the cover of that book over there."

><br>Buffy pointed at a small Watcher Diary that was sitting on the corner of Giles' desk, showing him the color of the girl's eyes. She leaned forward in the rolling office chair that she was sitting backwards in, a new chair that replaced the old one Giles used to have. He had complained forever that the chair fell over, so Snyder finally got him a new one, although it came out of his paycheck."

><br>So anyway, I'm staring at myself, and then the image kinda fades away and then I see my normal reflection in the mirror. I turn back to my bed, and try to get back into my body, but the little girl is lying in my bed staring back at me. Staring at me with those weird green eyes of hers. And the covers of my bed keep changing from their regular peach to this really pretty shade of lavender. Then I walk over and ask what her name is. And then she says 'I'm not suppose to talk to strangers.' And then I wake up."

><br>Giles made a "hmm" noise as he thought about Buffy's dream.

"Well, it may be prophetic," he told her, not an unusually dissection on her nightly dreams. "You are the Slayer, after all. Actually, Xander and Willow are researching some volumes that may be able to tell you what the dreams are about, whether it is a minor or major prophecy..." Giles was drifting off into Gileedom, his little land of book and researching and lore. A land that was hard to get him back from.

><br>"Woo-hoo, Giles, back to Earth," Buffy said, waving her hand in front of his face. Giles blinked, and then stared back at Buffy, this time her face registering.

><br>"Hmm, alright. Lets go research some of those book for ourselves." Giles stood up and walked to the door, waiting for Buffy to join him. Then he held the door courteously open for her, a gesture that did not go unnoticed. There was a special bond between Watcher and Slayer, and little things like that really did make the world go round. Now only if Buffy would be a more thoughtful Slayer...Giles held doors open for her, and Buffy had sex with her vampire boyfriend so that he turned into a vicious killer who went and killed Giles' girlfriend and tortured him. Not good.

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><br>Willow was busy reading, again, when she felt a soft shiver go throughout her whole body, originated somewhere between her belly and

her chest, then crawl up her spine, and then enter the back of her mind. The feeling was somewhat chilling, still very enjoyable. Willow creased her eyebrows in frustration. Where was...

><br>"WHO'S USING MAGIC?" Willow demanded, her tone much louder than she had meant it to be. She whirled around, and then noticed Xander still holding the book open, eyes darting from line to line and his lips moved softly, not making a sound.

><br>Willow reached out and knocked the book out of his Xander, causing Xander to jump and then look at, caught off-guard. "What are you doing!" she shouted, this time her voice in check. Xander, who didn't really know what he was doing (poor boy) just shrugged and said, "What?"

><br>Willow glared at him, and then bent over, grabbing the book from where it had landed on the floor, still open the page where Xander had been reading from. She quickly looked it over. If Xander had indeed cast a spell, surely there would be some indication of what exactly he had done...

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><br>After the vampire scare, Xander had been afraid to go, much less let the children out. He had gathered the whole family in the living room, and then spoke secretly to Cordelia while Julie and Josh had tried to listen in. Then, Xander had proposed that they stay in the house for the rest of the day, since it was the safest place that he could think of.

><br>"Brain-trust, Xander," Cordelia had told him gently, in her own version of gently. At least she had become slightly more caring over the years. "It's daylight outside. The vampires can't possibly get us." She then had waited quietly as Xander once again steered Julie and Josh back to the couch where their older stepbrother was waiting patiently and their younger half-sister was busy painting herself and the couch with her lollipop. "Besides, it's the 21st. Almost Christmas. We've got presents to buy and things to do. We just can't drop it because you're afraid vampires are going to magically appear in the sunlight. I promise, we'll be home a good hour before sunset, and pick up Nicholas from his violin lesson. And Julie and Josh from their soccer game. And Annie from Natalie's house."

><br>Xander had given her a wary look, but then gave in. They had breakfast, drove the kids to their respected places, and then took the subway to Fifth Avenue, right to the place where Cordelia had ended her torture yesterday.

><br>"Ooh, look at that dress!" Cordelia squealed for the fiftieth time that morning, tugging on Xander's arm, since his hands were full of packages and bags. Amazing that such young children could think of so many things that they wanted for Christmas.

><br>"Buy me that for Christmas?" Cordelia sighed, walking up to the window. She touched the glass lovingly as she imagined that she was touching the ice blue, slinky, sleeveless dress that was hanging on a display mannequin just inside. "Ooh, will you Xander?" She turned towards him, her eyes begging. It almost wanted to make him break out in laughter, although he knew that it would be rude. Women. Definitely the weaker of the sexes.

><br>"Sure, honey," he told her sincerely, coming up and with his free hand, caressing her right arm. She smiled warmly at him, liking his touch and the little PDA. "But that would mean we either a) return most of the kid's presents or b) narrow down your lists of 'All I Want For Christmas', because it's definitely just not teeth."

><br>Cordelia laughed, and then gave him a quick pop kiss on the

mouth, and then walked down the street ahead of him, swinging her hips the way he liked it. "I guess we'll have to get rid of those toys I wanted..." she said a bit wistfully.

><br>"Hey, wait, I thought those were on my list!" Xander said jokingly, coming up behind her. He grabbed her in a hug, and soon they were surrounded by a little circle of packages and very close to each others faces. The other New Yorkers around them wasted no time in passing by them quickly, or stopping to stare at the two people so obviously in love.

><br>"Xander, you are such...augggh," she teased, reaching up to grab the collar of his jacket. She tugged playfully on it and then set to buttoning the top button. She was close enough to feel his heart increase in it's rate of beating. Men. Definitely the weaker sex. "Such a complete idiot!"

><br>"I'm not a complete idiot," Xander protested, watching his wife do her little wife-y thing. "I have a few missing parts."

><br>Cordelia laughed again. "Don't I know it." That made Xander laugh along, though he was interrupted when Cordelia leaned in for another kiss, one that lasted a bit longer than the first.

><br>When she pulled away, Xander whispered, "People are staring."

><br>"You're eyes were open?" she admonished.

><br>"I like looking at you, even when we kiss. I can't take my eyes off of you."

><br>{Oh, how romantic}. She was melting. Cordelia whirled out of his embrace, something very hard to do on Fifth Street, 5 days away from Christmas. She smiled, her dimples showing, and held out her hand. Xander grasped hold of hers, running his fingers over her knuckles and over the wedding ring, the one identical to the one he wore on his own ring finger. They huddled close, because of the cold and the crowd and something more, and they continued walking.

><br>That was when Xander ran into the wall.

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><br>"Shit!" Xander swore loudly as he felt his noise connect with the wall. He closed his eyes and grasped his nose, trying to see if he had broken anything or if blood was coming out. When the hell was there a wall in the middle of Fifth Street's sidewalk?

><br>As the pain subsided, Xander opened his eyes to find out where the wall had sprung from. Then he noticed that he noticed that he wasn't on Fifth Street anymore.

><br>"Shi..." he started, but ended up trailing off. His eyes roamed up the wall, and as he stepped back, his eyes continued to rove over the double doors. "Where the..."

><br>Then he turned around, and saw a sight he'd thought he'd never, \*ever\* see.

><br>"Holy hell," he murmured, as he looked into the very frightened face of his younger self.

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><br>After Willow had begun to urgently read through the book, Buffy and Giles had come up behind Xander, asking what had happened. Xander had gotten flushed and said that he might had made a boo-boo. Giles, more than a little upset, yanked the book out of Willow's hands and set to deciphering what the heck Xander had done.

><br>A few seconds later, Buffy had whispered urgently to the other

three, "Hey, who's that?"

><br>They all stared at the stranger who had appeared out of nowhere, and then Xander had gotten the oddest feeling. He found himself walking, his feet like lead, to where the stranger was. Imagine his shock and surprise when the stranger turned around, and he found himself looking into an extremely familiar, but quite different, face.

><br>"Xander, what did you do \*now\*?" came the exasperated female voices from across the room.

><br>The two Xander's turned to look at the girls, the same exact things on their minds.

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><br>After Faith's surprise entrance ("Afraid of the competition, eh?") she had jumped onto the leather couch and practically melted in with her surroundings. Dressed in matching black leather, she was also wearing tons of silver jewelry, and she showed lots of skin. Even after her twenties, Faith could still pull the Goth thing off and look totally gorgeous. Of course, Buffy knew how she kept in shape.

><br>Buffy had sat down in the loveseat directly across from the couch, after coming back with more cocoa for herself and Faith. Faith didn't seem a bit cold; you worked a lot in the rain, being a Slayer, and your body grew stronger and more immune with every passing night. Buffy, though, was chilled by the subject matter at hand.

><br>"Prophecy?" she had asked, her voice barely audible.

><br>"Um, yeah," Faith had said. Then she had yawned, something she clearly wasn't planning on doing, because she clapped a hand over her mouth in surprise. "My Watcherâ€"my last Watcher, anywayâ€"told me something disturbing before I, ah, got rid of her. She was really into the book-learning thingâ€"such a turn-offâ€"but the women did have something useful to say."

><br>"Like what?" Buffy had urged, wanting to get everything over with. The last time she and Faith had ever spoken, or seen each other, was not under good terms. In fact, the terms were as far from good and they could get. Faith, though, was not acting openly hostile, much like Buffy remembered her to be. Always.

><br>Faith had inhaled deeply. God, this cocoa smelled good. Not like the instant coffee she had so grown tired of when she was on the road, and she was on the road a lot. {The story of my life}.

"Likeâ€"

><br>She was interrupted by the faint, childish wail of "Mother!" that came from upstairs. Faith looked at Buffy, raising her eyebrows. "I better go check on her," Buffy had said, getting up. Faith, although she had to personal contact with Buffy, knew every little intimate detail about her life. Entertainment Weekly and People would make a stalker proud. So, as Buffy raced up the marble steps, Faith understood.

><br>In a way. She, herself, had never been able to experience the joys of living in a house she actually owned, much less one this big. Or falling asleep in a bed that didn't change every week or so, next to a man who also didn't change every week or so, or to a man at all. And having a daughter...it must be a female thing, because even though Faith hated to admit it, she ached for the children she could never have. {Buffy, that bitch...} she had thought, clenching her fists in fury. She practically shook with long-repressed anger. {I can't believe I'm talking to her. I can't believe I'm sitting on her

couch. I can't believe I've stooped to getting help from that traitorous runaway}.

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><br>Upstairs, Buffy had pushed the door open to her daughter's bedroom and stood in the shadows of the doorway. Elisabeth Sarah was sitting up in bed, her face not so sleepy anymore, and nervously clutching the bedspread. Buffy strode across the living room and plopped down next to Es.

><br>"Another nightmare, sweetheart?" she had asked her, afraid of the answer that she would get. She put a comforting arm around her daughter and drew her into her lap. Elisabeth Sarah snuggled closer to her mother and rested her head on her chest. Buffy rested hers on her daughter's head, wrapping her arms tight around the little bundle of love.

><br>"Yes," Elisabeth Sarah had said in a small voice, afraid of admitting the truth. She buried her face in her mother's t-shirt.

><br>Jonah knew nothing of Elisabeth Sarah's "nightmares." Once Buffy had found out, she had been vaguely frightened that it would develop into a running theme, that sooner or later these prophetic dreams of her daughter's would lead to the conclusion that Es was a Slayer. The discovery that Es was turning out to be a very meek little girly-girl strayed far from that conclusion, and since Buffy was still alive (and as she had just found out, so was Faith), it seemed highly unlikely that Elisabeth Sarah was going to be a Slayer.

><br>Still, Es' clairvoyance bordered very much on the paranormal and strange. Come to think of it, it was just plain paranormal and strange. She did not want Jonah involved in any of those happenings. She did not want Jonah to become a "Slayerette" of sorts. Consequences would be too severe.

><br>"Do you want to talk about it?" Buffy had whispered, and she felt Elisabeth Sarah relax in her arms.

><br>"I'd like to," Es had murmured, pulling her face out of her Mom's t-shirt and sitting far back enough so that she could look her mother in the face. "It was weird.

><br>I was lying in my bed, and then I was in another bed, another nursery. And there was this pretty lady looking down at me, and she asked my name. I said I wasn't suppose to talk to strangers...I'm not, Mommy. Daddy told me so. So I didn't. And then I woke up...I don't know who's the pretty lady. Do you know?"

><br>Buffy had paused to think carefully, to put on a show for Es, but inside she had been bubbling with happiness. This didn't sound like one of Es' prophetic dreams; just something very regular. For all they knew, the lady Es dreamed of could have been anyone: ranging from a character made up from Es' subconscious to a lady of the supermarket that said something vaguely of interest to Es and it stayed in her mind.

><br>Just a regular kid.

><br>Buffy sighed.

><br>"I think I saw the lady at the supermarket," Buffy had told her gently, and Es had closed her eyes and smiled. Buffy wasn't the only one relieved that this wasn't some vision of portent. Back when the earthquake happened...Es couldn't sleep for nights before. All those terrible visions, and when she was awake too.

><br>She remembered three years ago, sitting at the lunch table, feeding Es some leftover pizza from last night, and the toddler was happily gnawing on the crust, ingesting more saliva than bread. Buffy

was heating up some slices for herself in the microoven, when Es suddenly started to cry. Buffy rushed to her side, reached out for her daughter's hand, and asked what was wrong. In between sobs, Es choked out the words "Mr. Harlen! Mr. Harlen! Oh Mommy, don't let him go!"

><br>Mr. Harlen was a man somewhere in his early 60's who had offered to fix a leak in the Daly house. Jonah had agreed, a contrast to his usual "I'm a man, I can do it" behavior, because he would be staying at work late. Jonah had ended up coming home early and gone to bed, but that was besides the point. Mr. Harlen had been up there when the earth began to shake. Buffy had gone outside and crawled up the tree besides the house, trying to rescue him. He had fallen off the roof, but Buffy was there just in time to grab his hand. She had a good grip...but then the tree had fallen over. She buckled herself in the right position to land without breaking any important bone, slightly awkward because she was holding on to Mr. Harlen. And then, she had let go, and the last thing she had heard from him when he was alive was his screams as the tree collapsed over him.

><br>Es could be eerily accurate.

><br>"I'm tired, Mommy," Elisabeth Sarah had said, yawning. She pulled away from her Mommy and crawled over to her pillow, diving under the covers. "Tuck me in," she giggled childishly.

><br>Buffy had laughed and shifted her position so that now she was beside Es. She kissed her daughter on the forehead and pulled the covers up to her chin, careful to keep Es' hands over the covers. Then she had picked up Mr. Gordo and a stuff monkey called Ms. Jumbles and placed them on alternate sides of her daughter. Es had smiled contently.

><br>"Night-night, Mommy," she had whispered, her eyelids already heavy with sleeps.

><br>"Sweet dreams," Buffy repeated from earlier that night. And as she stood up to leave the room, she realized that she really meant it. For everyone's sake.

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><br>Now Buffy stood in front of the couch, watching the deep, even breaths of Faith. Fallen right asleep while Buffy had gone upstairs to check on her daughter. Buffy wondered for a moment if it was all a trick. Faith had always seemed to be on the road, even before Buffy had left Sunnydale again, and she might have just wanted a place to stay for the night.

><br>But no, Faith would have come right out and demanded it. She wouldn't have lied about a prophecy to get in.

><br>Would she? Buffy didn't know. She didn't know anything anymore...and that lack of knowledge really bothered her.

><br>She heard a padded behind her on the carpet, and then heavy breathing. She smiled, and turned around, dropping to her knees.

><br>"Hey Giles," she said affectionately, grabbing Giles in a big bear hug.

><br>The golden retriever panted happily, and licked Buffy's face with his large, rough, red tongue. "Ew, doggy kisses," Buffy laughed, rubbing the top of Giles' shaggy blond head. Then she closed her eyes and kissed the dog on her nose. "You know just how to cheer me up, Giles."

><br>She could've sworn the dog grinned. But instead, Giles opened his mouth to bark, but Buffy grabbed his snout and pointed over to Faith.

><br>"Sleeping," she told the dog, who had grown to know the meaning

after the nights she had trained to be quiet around Es, who as a baby started to cry in fear whenever Giles barked at her. "Ssh."

><br>The dog looked back at Buffy, nodding his head sagely. The gesture was so human that Buffy smiled again. This dog had been around people for too long.

><br>Sometimes he reminded her of the real thing.

><br>"I'm not asleep," came the voice of Faith. Buffy turned around again, and saw Faith lifting her head off the leather couch. "You named the dog after your Watcher?" she said groggily, a faint smile on her face.

><br>Buffy blushed. "Uh...yes," she admitted, feeling a bit foolish. She put one arm around her dogs back and began to carefully run her hand over. Giles lay down, enjoying the feeling, and put his head on his front paws. He looked straight at Faith with that knowledgeable expression, blinking his big brown eyes.

><br>"I named a beagle after Xander once," Faith said, drifting off to nappy land again. She allowed herself a yawn. "It was a stupid dog. Damned horny, too."

><br>Buffy giggled. "Sounds like the Xander I remember."

><br>Faith didn't answer, because she was already snoring. Buffy cast a glance at her dog and raised an eyebrow. "Think we should do the same?"

><br>Giles snuffed heavily through his nose. His ear flicked back and Buffy took that as a sign of his distress.

><br>"Sorry Giles, reports of ancient prophecies are to be held off tomorrow due to sleepage," she told the dog. "Now how 'bout you and me snoozing a bit ourselves?"

><br>Giles snorted and quickly rose up to his feet, tail wagging and tug hanging out of his mind. "That a yes?" Buffy asked, rising up to her feet, grabbing the arm of the couch to steady herself.

><br>"Mommy?"

><br>Buffy whirled around, nerves taughtâ€"jeez, what the hell else was gonna present itself tonight?â€"when she realized it was only Es, standing at the stairs, holding the railing with one tiny hand. The large, lavender nightie seemed awfully big on her, and she seemed like the whisp of a ghost. She was so pale...she hadn't gone out much, lately.

><br>"What is it, Es?" Buffy asked for the fiftieth time that night, as Es climbed down the remaining steps and down into the living room, lost in the carpet. She walked over to where her Mom was and stood before her, her bottom lip jutting out just slightly.

><br>"Can I sleep with Giles tonight?" Es asked, looking at the dog. Giles, happy as ever to see her, quickly bounded up to her and licked her hand. Es allowed herself a tiny smile on her perfectly full lips.

><br>"You'll have to ask Giles," Buffy said. "And it seems to me like he totally agrees with you."

><br>Giles yipped softly, and nodded his head emphatically. Es smiled and patted her dog around the folds of his neck. Then she looked past Buffy, to the strange woman who was splayed out on the couch, snoring softly. "Mommy, who's that?"

><br>Buffy turned to meet her gaze, and then swallowed the lump in her throat. How was she gonna explain Faith to Es? How was she gonna explain Faith to \*Jonah\*. {Think, Buffy, think. A mind is a terrible thing to waste}. "She's a friend of Mommy's. She's sleeping over here...because she needs a place to stay for the night." She took Es' hand. "Maybe when she wakes up, you can talk and play with her." Yeah

right. Buffy did not want any of Faith's "personality" to rub off on her daughter.

><br>"Oh," Es said, letting her gaze drift over to the coffee table. She seemed slightly worried.

><br>"Es?" Buffy asked, prodding gently. "Is that the lady you had a dream about?"

><br>"No," Es said quickly and flatly. Buffy was relieved, until Es let go of Buffy's hand and pointed at a picture frame on the coffee table. "\*That's\* the lady from my dream."

><br>Buffy looked to where she was pointing, and quickly drew in her breath. It was a picture of her, taken outside the old house in Sunnydale. Her mother had taken the photo, a month or so before graduation. The graduation Buffy had never showed up for.

><br>"Um..." Buffy was at a total loss for words. What did \*this\* mean?

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><br>Xander watched as the vaguely familiar stranger open his eyes wide and drop the bags that he was carrying. There was the sound of glass breaking, and then the stranger winced, muttering something about a carousel. Then the man lifted one hand up, reaching out to Xander's face as though he was going to touch him to see if he was real, and then drew his hand back sharply. He backed away, up to the wall, looking at the library setting around him. He looked at the people in the back, and as his eyes settled on Giles all the color drained from his face. A colorful string of swear words erupted from his mouth.

><br>Then there was silence. Nobody seemed sure of what to do. Then the man, leaving the bags and much of his sanity behind, walked right up to the computer and peered at the others.

><br>Buffy was getting a little nervous, and the way that this man was staring at her was making her more nervous. "Hey," she snapped, "what're you looking at?" Actually...besides the fact this man might not even \*be\* a man, what with him appearing out of thin air, but he was rather good-looking, what with those muscles and that chest and...yummy. Even though he was way too old for her.

><br>The man blinked, and then tried to get his mouth working again. "What date is this?" he asked, his voice cracking like a teen-agers. Then he cleared his throat and asked a bit more forcefully, "What date is today?"

><br>Buffy was still staring/glaring at the man, Willow wasn't the world's greatest speaker, Xander was just joining the, so it was Giles' responsibility to answer. "Um, today is the 21st. Of December," he quickly added.

><br>The man rolled his eyes. "I mean, what \*year\*," he asked.

><br>"Year?" Willow's asked, her voice up in the high decibels.

><br>"1998," Buffy said quickly, filling him in. "Or, at least, until next week. I think"

><br>The man took this information in, looking down at the ground and his eyes growing a bit darker. Then he looked up and saying the following very slowly and very carefully, as though he did not believe that he himself knew what he was saying:

><br>"Now, none of you are going to believe this." A pause. "OK, maybe you will, living on the Hellmouth and all." Another beat. "My name is Alexander Harris. I'm 32 years old, and just a few seconds ago, I was walking down the streets of New York, Christmas shopping



with my wife. In the year 2013. So if any of have any ideas about how the hell I just went back 15 or so years in time, I'd be open to hearing them."

><br>The whole group just stared at him, wide-eyed. Then Giles cleared his throat again.

><br>"Xander," he said, staring at the young one. Both turned to look at them, faces drawn tight in fear and confusion. "I'm afraid that you've messed with something quite powerful."

><br>"What's new," said the older Xander, shooting a glare at his younger self.

### 3. Default Chapter Title

The library fell into silence. Xander looked at F-Xander with wariness. Buffy and Willow looked at each other with a sense of dread. Giles looked at Xander and made up his mind that Xander was to do no more research for awhile.

><br>"Wait, he can't possibly be me!" Xander blurted out with conviction, pointing at the imposter.

><br>F-Xander blinked and put on a stunned expression. "Why do you say that?" he asked, genuinely confused.

><br>Xander set his jaw. "I mean, look at him." F-Xander spread his arms and glanced down at his body. Loose black jeans and a form-fitting white shirt with an unzipped black winter jacket over it. "Those clothes match. I never match. And the bodyâ€"just look." It was true; F-Xander was definitely taller, with broad shoulders and muscles, the kind of build that Angel had. "Honestly, would I turn out like that? And the face is completely different." The face \*was\* different, almost nothing like young Xander's, but the one thing that was the same was the eyes. Those were Xander's eyes, definitely. But Xander wasn't about to admit that.

><br>This was just too damn weird.

><br>"And the accent," Xander finished with bravado. "I'm not British."

><br>The other Slayerette's turned imploring eyes to F-Xander. He just looked back at them. "You don't expect me explain myself, do you?" When there came no answer, F-Xander turned to Willow.

"Willow..."

><br>Willow took a protective step behind Buffy, afraid to look F-Xander in the eye. Buffy looked at him warily, not sure whether to wait and see if he would calmly and peacefully tell her why they should believe his claim, or whether should she force it out of him.

><br>F-Xander sighed. "Why should I expect anything else?" He moved back to the computer desk and sat on the edge where there was room. He held out his hand and began to tick off the things he said on his fingers. "A: Today was a lucky day. I dressed in the darkâ€"againâ€"and the clothes actually matched. My family was very proud of me.

><br>"B: I grew up. Rather well, don't you think? And I work out. Physiâ€"um, much working out is done." He swallowed uncomfortably as an unpleasant surfaced from the recesses of his mind. "And the face...I had a car accident. It got bashed up pretty bad." His hand reached up halfway to his face, as though he were going to touch it like a tangible reminder of the doctor's work, but then laid his hand to rest. "And as for the accentâ€"I'm always quizzed on that, I don't know why, it's not even that noticeable. I spent four and a half years in England. Never went away. But I don't say 'bloody this' and 'bloody that', or drink tea or eat crumpets, and I don't wear tweed.

Ew. Never had a thing for crumpets, and god knows how many times I was made to eat those back in Britain."

><br>At that, F-Xander smiled, and the skin around his eyes and mouth crinkled in their tell-tale Xander way. Xander's already wide eyes looked like his eyeballs were going to pop out right on the floor, and Willow muffled a gasp. This really was Xander.

><br>"If you are who you say you are," Giles said, getting over the shock, "then we'll have to return you back where you came from immediately.

><br>Was it just him, or were they treating him like his younger self had brought home a puppy from the streets and an annoyed parent was casting the dog out again? "I was just about to say that," F-Xander said, keeping the question to himself. "But the word of the day isâ€"how?"

><br>"W-well," Giles started, moving a hand to reach for his spectacles.

><br>"Research, huh," F-Xander said dejectedly. His shoulders slumped further. "I hate the library."

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><br>It was the night of the Winter Solstice, and she should be out there with Echo right now, right in that beautiful, empty, magick-filled prairie that had made them choose to live here in the first place, celebrating the birth of the Sun King. Unfortunately, most of the members of the White Rose Coven were spread out around North America, and they had had a hard time getting together this year. The coven was planning to celebrate together some time around the new year, in the ballroom of some unsuspecting hotel in a city that it was snowing. Possibly Chicago. MoonRaven had always had a yen for Chicago.

><br>A quiet shudder ran up the spine of Willow's back. Chicago...she remembered the last time she had been in Chicago. Hellmouth had been touring just after their first CD, and Willow was freshly scarred from that ordeal with her parents and still trying to get over from what had happened only three years ago. Her therapist was back in Florida, and both Oz and Echo had been a bit shaky on the decision to let Willow tour. Willow said she was ready, though, and that she could handle it. So off she went.

><br>She still remembered the scene. She and Echo were at the mall, window shopping because they had left their purses at the houses and hadn't felt like going back, since they discovered that little setback halfway to the mall. Their stomachs had been growling loudly, so they stopped by the food court, where they mooched off a ton of test foods. They were just coming out, licking the food from their fingers and giggling widely, when a wild eyed man in his late thirties had stopped them.

><br>"Have you seen a little boy?" he had asked them frantically, his hands flipping nervously at his sides. "He's about up to hereâ€"he put his hand somewhere by his hipâ€"and he has shaggy blond hair and the sweetest blue eyes." He reached out and gripped Willow's arm, his eyes half-crazed. "Please, I've lost my little boy. You've got to help me find him."

><br>Echo had gently peeled the man's hand off of Willow's and dropped it, but Willow's arm was still heavy with it's feel. "I'm sorry, we haven't seen your son," Echo had said sympathetically, and then began to walk away, dragging a motionless Willow behind her.

><br>"Will you tell him to come back, if you see him?" The man called to them, his voice filled with despair. Willow couldn't help but look

back. "If you see him, tell him to come back. I can't lose my little boy..."

><br>Obviously, something was wrong with this man's mind, but Willow was stung by his words nonetheless. Emotions had been hard to handle for her lately, and people were always in some state of depression or hunger or sorrow or despair or grief...she just couldn't handle it. That's what Echo and Oz had been so hesitant about permitting her to tour. And that's why she had fainted right then and there, and had to be taken to a hospital because she was having seizures, brought on by her fragile mental state. And that's why when Hellmouth toured, Willow always stayed in the hotel room. And that's why the only people she ever made contact with was fellow band members, close friends, coven members, and the occasional chip and cheery reporter. That's why she didn't like to be around people.

><br>So now she was standing on the balcony, hand and hand with Oz, staring at the horizon where the sun, in just a few minutes, was sure to make it's appearance. The sunrise was not only symbolic to the holiday, but a very romantic setting. Too bad that she was being plagued by unwanted memories.

><br>Next to her, Oz mistook her internal shiver for external cold, and took off his jacket and draped it around Willow's shoulders. It wasn't really cold, but the air conditioner that whirred away inside was blowing quite a current of air throw the open French doors (Echo had them installed: "Ooo, aren't they just gorgeous, guys? I want French windows in every apartment we're gonna live in!"). She knew that Oz was a bit chilly, what from him coming out with a jacket and all, and snuggled against, returning the little gesture.

><br>"Who needs a jacket when I have you," Willow said dreamily, closing her eyes for a moment as she listened to the beat of Oz's heart.

><br>It raced. "I was just thinking the same thing," Oz said, smiling and holding her close. He casually encircled his wife's slim waist with one hand and stroked her beautiful long hair with the other. He loved her hair, loved playing with it, loved touching it, loved seeing the light reflect off of it. It was his most favorite part of her...well, that and her lips. {And her heart}. "Same thing."

><br>Willow's smiled widened and blushed deeply, something she still did around Oz, even after all these years of being married. The sun was close to risingâ€"she didn't have to open her eyes to know that the nighttime sky was already an array of deep oranges and pinks and blues. She could sense the magickal energy, like a train of power coming at her. It was a wonderful feelingâ€"almost as wonderful as Oz's love.

><br>Almost.

><br>Oz was stroking her face now, ever-so-tenderly as though she were made of china and he was afraid she would break. "I love you, Willow," he whispered, and then rested his head on her chin, something that Willow's father use to do when she was a little girl. Her father was her big protector and hero when she was young; now that she was older, Oz was her hero, her protector. And so much more.

><br>"Oh Oz, I love you so much," Willow said, snuggling closer to...a rock?

><br>Willow opened her eyes wide and pulled away in terror. She didn't give a glance to her surroundings, just looked at what she had just been hugging. A marble angel, a beautiful piece of artwork that stood on top of a gravestone.

><br>Now Willow looked around, wide-eyed. She was in a graveyard. And not just any graveyard. She recognized this place.

><br>Sunnydale City Cemetery.

><br>"Oh darn," Willow said meekly, hugging herself and looking around wide-eyed. Graveyards creeped her out. Graveyards were spooky. She hated graveyards.

><br>Ok, so she was in Sunnydale. She could...perhaps, deal with that. She was a stronger, healthier person, but this was bad. Despite the fact that she had just been magically transported to Sunnydale, this was not Sunnydale, 2013. No, Willow knew that the city cemetery was most definitely burned to cinders. Yet, the cemetery which she beheld with her own eyes was most definitely *\*not\** burned down to cinders. It was very non-cinder-y.

><br>Willow took a step back, and realized that her bare feet were digging into soft, fresh soil. She looked down and saw that her feet were covered in the dark brown stuff. Willow pulled her feet out one by one and shook them free of dirt, stepping into the clean grass to the right of the grave. Then she leaned over to read the tombstone, one hand on the angel's wing to steady herself.

><br>She definitely needed the angel's support. Willow leaned heavily on the wing, her mind dizzy, her head spinning, her heart racing, and a cold pit of fear replaced what was once her stomach.

><br>This was too much to be bargained for.

><br>As Willow fainted across the grave, a shaft of moonlight from the almost-full moon above trickled unto the gravestone, shedding light on the marker. It read:

><br>~Shelley Shovanak~

>January 1st, 1974 â€" December 19th, 1998<br>~May her guardian angel guide her to peace and eternal rest~

><br>Uh-oh.

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><br>She was so tired. She'd been on the road for so long, in that truck of hers (well, the truck driver that she had taken it from didn't deserve it, after what he'd tried to do to her) which had broken down about a mile from where Buffy lived. She had walked all the way to the Daly {god it's so hard to accept that Buffy's married} house in the rain, probably catching a cold, and to top it all off, had to fight a vampire. And now, when she was in a nice, comfy room in a nice, comfy setting, the air between Buffy and her was not the only thing uncomfortable. The damned leather couch was pretty uncomfortable, too.

><br>Ok, ok, so she'd sleep on anything, but something was really wiggling her out about this place. Not the actual place, just this house. She knew how to sense mystical forces, and they were very near to here, however dormant. For a second, she wondered if this Hollywood suburb was on a Hellmouth.

><br>"Wouldn't that be interesting," Faith said wryly, propping her head up on the arm of the couch and stretching her legs. She wondered if she could watch TV here, since she was just itching to see the picture on the enormous DigiTel.

><br>The energy she sensed grew louder. The prophecy that her Watcher had warned her of flicked through her mind. Could it...no way. Faith shrugged the thought away. In the morning, when Buffy came back down to shoo her out of the way of her husband and daughter, Faith would bluntly drop the information on her, and then leave. She didn't want to stay *\*here\** for too long.

><br>She was just leaning over to reach the remote, precariously balanced on the sofa's edge, when she felt as though her body had been dipped in ice-cold water. The shock ran like needles throughout her whole body, gripping her mind in a state of panic. She

screamedâ€”

><br>â€”and gasped in surprise as water flooding into her mouth and choked on her closed passage.

><br>Faith's eyes widened, and then sensation turned into an image around her. She in the water, blue-green water, and the sunlight was playing all over the sand by her feet. \*Sand\*. And the water that had gotten to her mouth was saltyâ€”sea water.

><br>Oh god, she was drowning in the sea.

><br>Faith did a scissors kick, reaching up vainly with her arms towards the sunlight that was visible above. She was never a good swimmer, and she had always swum in rivers or really, really peaceful lakes. Oceans were big. Oceans were unpredictable. Oceans were scary.

><br>The fact that she was strong and hadn't had to float all the way down to the floor had done her good. She had broken the surface in just under a few minutes, gasping for breath and trying to clear the hair out of her eyes while keeping afloat. She blinked, trying to get the stinging feeling out of her eyes. She rubbed them, but it only made it worse.

><br>There. A strip of shore. Beach. Sand. Land. Faith remembered a long time ago, when she was 13, and the really cute instructor was trying to teach her how to swim. "I want to swim just like those Olympic people," she had told him, and he had taught her the move with her hands, the butterfly or chest something-or-other. She couldn't remember the name, but for the life of her she'd better remember how to do it.

><br>God she was freezing, and her legs were aching. \*Deal\* Faith told herself angrily, and began to swim towards the bit of shore.

><br>Did she mention how the ocean was unpredictable? She didn't feel the large wave come up behind her, hardly noticed the little ripples that proceeded it. Then she was up in the air for a brief moment, carried on the lump, and then she was dashed down into the water like a stone, suddenly losing all sense of where up or down and left or right were. Her brain, not knowing how to deal with being cut off from everything, pumped adrenaline into her brain. She kicked furiously, driven by the frenzy created in her veins, but she couldn't match the swirling waters of the wave, and she let her body go slack as the wave tossed her like a rag doll towards the shore...

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><br>As Faith groggily came back to awareness, the first thing she noticed was that she was freezing cold, and that while her mouth was not moving, her teeth were on the verge of chattering frantically. The next thing that she noticed was the small bit of water that kept soaking her hair, and then disappearing. Waves. The third thing that she noticed was that she was lying on sand, rocks jabbing uncomfortably into her spine, bits of beach caked to her bare arms and legs. The final thing she noticed was the warm, cozy body that was snuggled next to her.

><br>The hell...Faith opened her eyes wide and was greeted by a starry night sky, gorgeous if she had been star gazing instead of being the victim in a game of Pickle between waves. She sat up, pain wrenching in her back as she realized that the rocks were also in her shirt, not just on the sand which she had been lying on. Then, blinking the sting away from her eyes, she turned around to her side.

><br>Curled up in a ball was the shivering form of Giles, Buffy's

dog. "Gripes, could this get any weirder?" Faith asked, wondering if she should kick the dog awake. Instead, she just reached over and nudged his head a little.

><br>Giles' eyes instantly flashed open, and with one look at Faith, bounded up. Her earlier appearance of being dead had frightened him very much, and now he was overjoyed that he had a friend in this strange place that he had been dropped off in. He barked happily, and then placed his front paws on her stomach, trying to reach up and lick her face, but Faith shoved him away.

><br>"Stupid dog, let me find out what kind of mess we're in here!" she reprimanded him. She was never fond of animals, except for Xander the beagle. Eventually, though, she had given Xander the beagle away for adoption, because beagles weren't the ideal pets for travelling conditions. Maybe she'd get a husky and name it after Willow or something, considering the dog was female.

><br>She was thinking about that as she surveyed her surroundings. She was on a little strip of beach, very, very tiny, and surrounded by thick walls of the kind of grass that grew around the beach. Grumbling, she began to climb the walls, noticing that Giles was eagerly falling in step.

><br>"When I find out where we are," she told the dog as they climbed, "the second thing I want to know is how the hell you got here. Then I'll ask about myself."

><br>In return, Giles sneezed. Had the dog gotten sick? He didn't look wet, but she didn't look that wet either and she had gotten a good dunk in the sea. After she found out where they were, they should find shelter and dry themselves off. Possibly with a towel lying around, one that some beach-going freak had left behind.

><br>God, why did people go to the beach? The sand always got in everything and anything, the sun was a killer, and the ocean was always after you. Not even counting the man-o-wars and jelly fishes and sharks and all those other things in the deep. Faith had never been scared of anything; she'd always been the tough girl, never believing in monsters under her bed, never afraid of confronting the beyond. But the ocean was another thing entirely—her one true childhood fear that had carried itself onward into her adulthood.

><br>When she got over the ridge, she recognized nothing. This land, these buildings...all foreign to her. She peered closer, using her enhanced sight, and spotted a couple nuzzling each other on the other strip of beach. As Giles nudged her in her side, she pushed his head away and climbed out of the hole, dragging the golden retriever along with her as she made her way towards the couple.

><br>When she got there, the boy was busy sticking his tongue down the girl's throat, and Faith had to clear her throat several times before they noticed she was there. The girl, who was topless, quickly wrapped a beach towel around her upper self as the boy jumped up with a flashlight and shined it on Faith's face.

><br>"Who are you?" he demanded, the fright in his voice not enabling him to sound in charge of the situation.

><br>"Your conscience," Faith snapped, not the best of moods. She put her hands on her hips and passed a look between the couple. "How old is that girl, anyway?"

><br>"Fifteen—hey, why do you want to know?" he said angrily, cutting himself off before he revealed that he was with a minor. The flashlight was still in Faith's eyes, and she shielded her gaze with one hand.

><br>"I told you: I'm your frickin' conscience. And I want to know where the hell we are. Mind telling me?"

><br>The boy seemed hesitant to answer, but the girl, wanting very much to get rid of this woman, quickly spoke up. "Sunnydale Public Beach," she said in a small voice, embarrassed at being caught mid make-out session.

><br>Faith's icy glare crumbled into an expression of unbelieving shock. "No way," Faith said immediately, shaking her head furiously. "No way is this place still open to the public. No one's allowed anywhere near Sunnydale, or even the surrounding towns. Jeez, do you know what risk you guys are taking, being here on the beach and all that??" Faith was goggle-eyed.

><br>The couple looked at her, and then laughed. "You're crazy," said the guy, flicking his flashlight off. "We live in Sunnydale, lady. We can definitely be where we are."

><br>Faith eyes widened even more. The only things that lived in Sunnydale were, well, \*things\*. And these people, \*people\*, were not things. They were very much human, and very much not afraid, and very much confusing her.

><br>"Ok, what's going on?" Faith said. "Have I, like, been suddenly transported to another dimension or something? Back in time? What? What year is this?"

><br>They continued looking at her like she was a loony. Maybe she was. "1998, lady," said the guy, fingering his flashlight again. "And now that you know that, can you leave?"

><br>1998? Huh? \*What\* was going on? "Uh," Faith managed, and then composed herself. Obviously, this had to deal with that prophecy her last Watcher had vaguely told her about. "Gimme a towel."

><br>"Lady, the one towel we got is on my date over there." The guy jerked the flashlight over to his date, who was blushing and pulling the towel up higher to conceal cleavage. "Why the hell are you swimming without a towel? And why the hell in your clothes?"

><br>"Don't ask questions," Faith growled. "You'll exhaust yourself. Just give me the towel and ask your kiddy date to cover herself with that t-shirt of hers that is lying around \*somewhere\* were you guys tossed is away in the throes of passion. And if you give me that towel, I won't report you to Sunnydale Police." Yeah, if they were telling the truth and if there still \*was\* a Sunnydale Police Department.

><br>"Here," the girl said quickly before her date could speak for her. She tossed the towel at Faith and then covered herself with her arms. Faith took the towel and started to walk away, drying her hair and mumbling thanks to the strange couple.

><br>"Hey, wait!" called the girl. Faith turned around. "Where's your dog?"

><br>Faith's jaw dropped, and then she looked to her side and around everywhere. Giles was no where to be seen. "Damn," she cursed, gritting her teeth. Then she set out at a fast pace towards Sunnydale, and she would hopefully run into that mutt along the way.

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><br>He couldn't get that day with Buffy out of his mind.

><br>It was a Christmas miracle, truly. He had planned to kill himself, planned to totally annihilate his worthless, evil being, but the sun had not risen because of snow. Snow in Southern California. Obviously, there was some otherworldly intervention in this.

><br>So, as he did his own nightly rounds around Sunnydale, he

thought about how he had spent that day. It was wonderful; whenever he saw Buffy, it was only for that short period of time during the night. Now, he had the opportunity to spend the whole day with her, and they enjoyed it to the fullest. Nothing like playing in the snow to cheer any suicidal person up.

><br>Now, though, they were staying apart, swearing there would not be another day like, holding hands and being together and contemplating kisses. No, it was dangerous to be tempted like that, to dangerous to ever fall in love again. It was very clear as to what the consequences would be.

><br>Buffy...completed him. Made him feel human. Made him feel whole. Every day of his undead life was plagued by thoughts of her, and he was almost certain that Buffy was experiencing the same thing. Could they deny their passion? Could they keep away from each other, even if they knew the consequences? Could they not...

><br>Angel didn't finish that sentence in his mind, though very clear memories of that night flashed through his mind. It was his most happiest momentâ€"he shivered with happiness just thinking about it. This was dangerous. This could no longer continue.

><br>He kept \*telling\* himself that...

><br>Suddenly, his hyper-sensitive, preternatural hearing picked up a soft moaning sound. Moving like a shadow between the tombstones and the grave plots, angel quickly hurried to where the moaning was coming from.

><br>There was a figure, a figure dressed in a long red nightgown, strewn across a freshly dug plot. For a second he thought she was a vampire, and then Angel realized that he did not sense her as one of his kind. She was very human, but with a strange...scent, of sorts. At least to him.

><br>Since she was human, she was most likely in trouble. Angel leaned over and brushed her red hair out of the way, exposing her neck. He was expecting bite marks, but there was nothing. The neck was clean.

><br>Even stranger. Angel slid his hand under the woman's body, grabbing a firm hold around the waist. Gently, in case she had any broken bones, he turned her over. Her long red hair still covered her face. Angel gently brushed it away, and the female stirred.

><br>Angel would have drawn his breath in sharply, if he had breath. Instead, he mimicked the motion as he stared at the face. The recognizable face. "Willow?"

><br>The woman stirred once more at the mention of the name. Angel looked on in amazement as she opened her eyes and looked up dreamily into his face.

><br>"Where am I?" she asked, reaching up to rub her eyes. Then she frowned and looked up. "You're not Oz..." she said quizzically, yet not really grasping what she was saying. Then she recognized the face that was staring back at her.

><br>"Oh joy," Willow said, her eyes rolling up in her head once more, and she went limp in Angel's arms.

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><br>He wasn't sure he should go in. He wasn't sure about anything anymore.

><br>God had it hurt when he saw Willow with Xander, kissing each other on the bed like that...his heart had broken into a million little pieces. What was worse, though, was not being together with Willow. He missed her...half of him had gone with her, the part of him that could love, leaving an empty, cold shell behind. He needed



that half, and he needed Willow. He thought, perhaps, that having her back would fill that emptiness.

><br>It didn't fill it at all; all it did was show Oz how wide it was. Whenever he looked at Willow...he saw not the girl that he had loved so deeply, but the girl that he could no longer trust as deeply. He still loved that smile, he still loved her touch, and he still loved her kisses, but to know that she had given the same exact pleasure to Xander made him jealous. He had been jealous before...but now he had reason to. And dammit, he was.

><br>So now he stood outside the library, hands hovering next to the thin piece of metal that when pushed, would open the door. Open the door to the library. The place where he and the other Slayerette's had gathered so often, chatting about how they were going to revert the next day's apocalypse. Except now there was an apocalypse of a different kind.

><br>Oh well. Tomorrow was the beginning of his days as a werewolf, and he wanted to spend this night with Willow. Perhaps try and fill the void that stood between them like the Grand Canyon. Try to reach out to her...try to reach out to her without instinctively drawing back, afraid of being hurt like that again.

><br>He didn't want to be hurt like again. Pain was not the top emotion on his favorite's list. Heck, it wasn't even on there.

><br>{Sooner or later I have to go in} Oz thought to himself. {If I'm going to do it, now is as good as any other time}.

><br>Slowly, he touched the door. Then, the hinges creaking, he opened the door softly.

><br>Everyone turned to him with a surprised expression, as though they were expecting someone else. "What?" Oz asked, feeling a little out of place. Then he noticed the stranger sitting on the computer desk, staring at him with a cocked head.

><br>Oz was wondering what he was staring at when the doors opened behind him. Angel came in, carrying a woman in his arms who's face was covered in hair. Her red nightgown was stained with dirt, and her slightly pale and willowy frame hung limp in Angel's embrace.

><br>Oz was forming the word "what" again when the man sitting next to Xander rose and strode quickly towards the vampire, scowling all the way. Angel looked just as confused as Oz did, and was startled when the man grabbed the woman out of his arms. Muttering curses, the strange man lay the strange woman down on the table, clearing a bunch of books out of the way first.

><br>Oz moved closer to Buffy, as much to get away from Angel as to figure out what was going on. "What's up?" he whispered in her ear.

><br>"What would you say if I told you that that man right there was Xander, fifteen years into the future?" Buffy asked pointedly, taking her eyes off from watching the man for just a second to gauge Oz's reaction.

><br>Oz was pretty cool about it. "Well, I'd guess I'd believe you, because everything else has happened here in Sunnydale, and I don't think I have much choice in the matter."

><br>Buffy nodded and turned back to F-Xander, who was sucking on his teeth and cradling the woman's head, whispering something softly in her ear.

><br>"I-I think she was waking up when I brought her in," Angel said, for the lack of having anything else to say that sounded remotely intelligent.

><br>F-Xander muttered something very vulgar under his breath and then reached up with one hand to the side of the strange woman's

neck. He grabbed a bit of flesh and then pinched her, really, really, hard.

><br>The woman let out a gasp and she rose with a shriek, facing her stunned audience. Shivering either from shock or cold, she put two trembling hands towards her face and parted her long red hair.

><br>The others were not completely surprised by the sight, except perhaps maybe Oz and Angel. Since F-Xander had come back from the future, and Willow had felt the magic, then it was completely possible that she would come back too.

><br>Besides, which \*other\* Slayerette had red hair?

><br>What the gang \*was\* shocked at was the face. F-Willow seemed not to have aged a day beyond her seventeen years. The smooth, pale, oval face was still the same, and despite the increase in her, ahem, chest, this pretty much looked like young Willow, frail form and all. Pretty blue eyes blinked at the troupe, not recognizing their surroundings.

><br>Then she turned around, looked at F-Xander, looked back at everybody again, and then back to F-Xander. She uttered a moan and prepared to faint once again.

><br>"Oh-oh," F-Xander muttered, catching her as she fell into his arms. "\*No way\* are you fainting again. Wake up, Will, c'mon. Everything's ok. Just deep, even breaths."

><br>F-Willow opened her eyes quickly and sat up woozily. "Ok? Everything's \*ok\*? Xander, clue into reality here." She pointed to her younger self, and let her finger roam around the library. "\*This\* is not ok. This is definitely not ok. This is not even \*close\* to ok here. This is very far from ok. This is bad. This is bad and wrong, wrong, wrong. You can't get any farther from ok than this, even ifâ€"

><br>F-Xander grabbed her shoulders and clapped one hand around her mouth. F-Willow looked suddenly very frightened as F-Xander spoke with deadly calm that he sometimes used in his line of work. "Willow, you know I hate to do this, but you're babbling. Your \*really\* babbling, and we don't need this right now. What we need to do is to be stop babbling and be cooperative, and find out from them how to get back where we are." He leaned forward and looked into F-Willow's eyes. "Do you understand, Will? Get what I'm saying?"

><br>F-Willow nodded, eyes wide in panic, but they were drooping to regular size. When F-Xander removed his hand, F-Willow took one look around the library, laid her eyes on her younger self standing next to Giles, and found just the right spot on F-Xander's shoulder to cry.

><br>As F-Xander awkwardly wrapped her in a hug and patted her on the back, Oz felt a surge of anger and jealousy flow through him. \*What had gone wrong?\* After everything, Willow did end up with \*Xander\* after all? Was the universe up to slapping him upside the head every time the shiniest bit of happiness was in his life. I mean, there he was when he was five, the perfect family, when his dad decided to run off with the postwoman. Later, after moving to Sunnydale and all that, he had hooked up with Dingoes Ate My Baby and looked towards the bright future of getting signed...and then nothing. Willow entered his life, and everything seemed like bliss...until she started smooching and who-knows-what-else with Xander behind his back. Oh, yeah, and the werewolf thing was pretty bad too, although he was dealing with it well enough and the only thing bad was that he regularly missed Dingoes gigs. But this certainly topped the charts.

><br>You couldn't tell that Oz was angry on the outside, though. His

expression remained the same, if just a bit stonier, and his clenched fists were shoved in the pants pockets. He hoped to God he wasn't made to say anything, because then he'd surely blow.

><br>Willow and Xander were surprised themselves. They looked at each other, blushing until their faces were the color of F-Willow's dyed hair. {How did we end up together} Willow thought to herself. {How could I have let go of Oz?}.

><br>Oz. Willow snuck a peek at him. He seemed perfectly fine, if not a bit tense. {But I just know he's so not ok with this} Willow thought, her emotions so confusing that she wanted to burst into tears like he double.

><br>"Um, I think this may be a bad time," Angel said, clearing his throat, "but what's going on?" He looked imploringly at the Scooby Gang.

><br>"\*Very\* bad time, Dead Boy," F-Xander growled, shooting a glare at the vampire while continuing to sooth a very disturbed F-Willow's hair. Angel took a step back, obviously recognizing the nickname. The vampire mouthed "Dead Boy" silently, and then his eyes lit up as he understood the connection.

><br>"Xander?" the vampire asked, wondering what the Hellmouth had done this time.

><br>F-Xander ignored the question and instead tipped F-Willow back so that she had to look at him. "Do you think you're ok now?" he asked softly, wiping a tear away with the side of one finger.

><br>F-Willow smiled weakly. "As ok as I can possibly get at this moment." She slid off the table and regained balanced on her two feet. She then turned to look at Giles, her bottom lip quivering at intervals.

><br>"Um, alright...since something has obviously happened, does anybody mind explaining to me how this anomaly came to pass? Or has no one found out exactly how yet?" F-Willow brought one delicate fingernail to her lips and began to chew away her nail polish. Her eyes turned away from Giles and flicked back to Xander.

><br>"Um," Giles said, unsure of how he was going to explain this over and over again to all of tonight's "visitors." "Xander was overlooking a book that contained a spell, and he must have intentionally cast it, because you are here, and in all cases, it must be connected to the spell. I don't believe that everyone's future selves would just back if they had not a push."

><br>"Well, it's not everyone," F-Xander pointed out. "Last time I counted, it was Past: 4 and Future: 2. Our side's missing some players." F-Xander glanced at F-Willow, and she nodded enthusiastically. Then F-Xander turned back to the group.

><br>Oz couldn't stand this. They both were being so...affectionate. He wondered if he was red, or green, or some other color that your skin was not suppose to be when you didn't feel like killing somebody because they'd stolen the girl of your dreamsâ€"twice. Why was he still standing here?

><br>Buffy blinked. "Um, uh, do you have any ideas as to how we could get you guys back..." Buffy, making the matching motions with her hands. She raised her eyebrows, not even wanting to look at the three very tense, very awkward-feeling people around her.

><br>"An idea..." F-Willow closed her eyes and sighed loudly and sharply. "I suppose I could divine something, only I wish Oz was here with me. Ever since we had our handfasting our ability to wield magick has worked so much better together."

><br>"Oz?" Willow asked, the voice coming out as a high-pitched sound. She covered her mouth self-consciously, but she then drew it quickly away. "Oz?" she asked, everyone understanding it now.

><br>"Oz, yes, handfasting, husband..." F-Willow trailed off, and her eyes flittered to the three people. "Oh, no way." She turned to look at F-Xander and for a moment something silent passed between them. Then they both started to laugh.

><br>"You didn't think...us?" F-Xander asked as F-Willow giggled cupped her hand over her mouth. "No way, we would never..." Then he stopped mid-sentence and mentally backed up. He grabbed the back rung of a chair and leaned a bit heavily on it. He remembered what year it was, what month it was.

><br>"What's wrong, Xander?" F-Xander turned to look at her, and then she got it. "Oh...\*oh\*." She stopped laughing. "Sorry for laughing," she whispered softly. Then she slumped down into the seat that Xander was still attached to.

><br>Willow shot a glance towards Oz, and he gave her a weak smile. Willow took that as a sign that he was able to stand her now, and she slowly inched next to him.

><br>"Ok, let me look at the spell that, um, uh," F-Willow looked up at F-Xander, "Xander did, and I'll see if I can undo it and send us backâ€" "

><br>She was interrupted by the sudden sound of raucous barking coming from outside. The whole group turned, puzzled, towards the sound.

><br>"The hell is that?" F-Xander asked.

><br>He was soon answered as the double doors burst open and a dirty, wet, seaweed-covered dog came bounding into the library. The dim lighting shone off it's golden, shaggy coat, and it skidded to a stop right in the center of the decorative floor-tile pattern, letting out another sharp bark. Then, tongue lolling out of its mouth, it turned to where Angel was still standing. It's matted fur bristled up, and it's mouth pulled up in a snarl, showing it's long, white, sharp teeth.

><br>Angel backed considerably to the doors. He was getting no answers as to what was going on, the people in the room weren't exactly his best buddies, and the dog was ready to rip his preternatural being apart. Time to go.

><br>Yeah, time to go if the woman had not burst into the room, tripping over her tow and falling head first into the floor. Despite the fall, she rolled herself into a tight ball and hit the floor on her back, somersaulting next to the dog. Then, grunting, she pulled herself up again and grabbed the dog by the nap of it's neck, lifting the large animal off the floor.

><br>"Damn dog," she growled, and then realized where she was. She dropped the dog to the floor, and then started to edge near where F-Xander and F-Willow were, her large, expressive black eyes rolling around.

><br>"Faith?" F-Willow asked, her hands curling up to her neck, cradling herself.

><br>F-Faith turned to look at her, and nodded. "What on the Hellmouth is going on here?" Faith asked, jerking her head towards Buffy & Crew.

><br>"We're trying to figure that out right now," F-Xander answered. Then he grinned, sizing her wet, ragged-looking self. "Talk about all washed up," he added, not able to resist.

><br>He ducked as a stake-turned-missile came flying at his head. "Not in the mood, Harris," F-Faith growled, giving him a glare that made vampires cower. F-Xander gulped and just grinned lopsidedly.

><br>F-Faith, content at shutting up Xander, put her hands on her hips and turned to look at everyone. "Ok, so..." Her voice trailed

off as she noticed that the dog was still growling. "Shut up, Giles," she told the dog, kicking it in the side. D-Giles didn't even notice, staring straight at Angel. F-Faith turned to see what he was looking at.

><br>The next thing Angel knew, he was pinned against the wall, F-Faith with a good grip on his neck and a stake held high in her right hand. "Goodbye, Angelus," she told him sweetly, bringing her arm back and then swinging it towards his heart. Angel squeezed his eyes shut, waiting for the End to come.

#### 4. Default Chapter Title

Buffy watched as F-Faith suddenly turned around and realized that Angel was in the room. In a blur of motion, F-Faith suddenly had Angel pinned up against the wall, and pulled another stake out of seemingly thin-air. Muttering something to him, she pulled back her arm and prepared to plunge it in his heart.

><br>Uh-uh, not while Buffy was still in the room. Hurrying to her ex's defense, she ripped F-Faith off of Angel before she could get the job done. Both of them tumbled to the ground, but F-Faith put her leg under Buffy's, and the present slayer fell to the floor, hard. F-Faith did a bellyroll and then sat on top of Buffy, grabbing her by the collar and then leering in her face.

><br>"What, are you an idiot," she growled. "Are you still trying to protect your damned little boyfriend. I don't know who I should kill first, him orâ€"

><br>"â€"no one," F-Xander finished up for her and he nudged F-Faith with the toe of his shoes. Angry, F-Faith bounced back up, her whole demeanor asking for a fight. "Uh, Faith? As much as I'd like to fight with a Slayer, because you know how much I enjoy shortening my life expectancy, I propose instead we have a \*talk\*," he looked over at F-Willow, "between ourselves before we do anything stupid or drastic." He let the final word hang heavy in the air as his dark brown eyes settled back on F-Faith.

><br>F-Faith scowled at him, but crawled off of Buffy and grabbed F-Xander's sleeve. "Then we talk," she grumped, looking towards F-Willow. F-Xander raised his eyebrows in a come-over-here gesture.

><br>F-Willow looked back at them nervously, and then her eyes darted from the Gang to Angel, and then back to her fellow visitors from the future. She gulped and then climbed on top of the table, scurrying across it and the room to get as far away from anybody that she could possibly be.

><br>While the threesome made their way to a tiny corner of the library, Buffy turned to Giles. "So, what's the deal with the time warp?" Buffy asked brightly, popping up on her heels in a decidedly Willow fashion.

><br>Giles was focusing on something over Buffy's shouldersâ€"the empty spot where Angel had stood but seconds agoâ€"but now his eyes focused on the slayer. "Hmm, time warp," Giles mused, bringing a hand up to his chin. He rubbed it thoughtfully. "Could be."

><br>Xander shifted nervously on one foot. "So, uh, can..." he shot a look at where the three adults were discussing in confidence.

F-Xander had one protective arm slung over a trembling F-Willow, and F-Faith, wet and bedraggled as she was, managed to pull herself together and was looking fairly foreboding as she reared up on her heels and yelled something angrily at F-Xander. "Can Willow fix what happened?" It felt strangely odd to be talking about his best friend as though she were not there. But she was, both aspects of her. And

his other "aspect" was with his arm around her other, and without even looking Xander could tell that Oz was jealous.

><br>"We would have to ask her," Giles said, throwing a glance at the trio. F-Xander was now yelling back at F-Faith, and she had stop her arguing to hear his argument. F-Willow was clinging on to F-Xander's side, and she didn't look up to casting a circle, much less gathering her physic energy to peer into the shadows of the ether.

><br>"Don't you think I know that?" F-Xander was yelling at F-Faith, and he had the advantage of being a head taller than her. He looked down at her, and although F-Faith could lick him if she tried, it was still somewhat menacing. "If anyone should want to kill him, it should be me. And Willow. And all of Sunnydale in general. But we're not going to, because we're not going to do some Hellmouth version of Back to the Future 2. Catch what I'm saying, Faith?"

><br>"Ok, I get the damn point!" F-Faith yelled back, standing on tiptoe and her fists clutched at her side. "But I say that if Angelus gets within five feet of me, I'm staking that son of a bitch, no matter \*what\*!" F-Faith was so much into this that the veins on her neck were standing out. "And don't you tell me otherwise!"

><br>"Fine," F-Willow said hurriedly, putting one slim hand on F-Xander's chest, stopping him from lunging forwards towards Slayer #2. "If Angel comes near you, then you stake him. But don't \*you\* go near \*him\*. Don't you go looking for a fight." She finished off with a comically fierce expression that passed off as pathetic in her current state.

><br>F-Faith shook her head, her short mane of wispy black hair fluttering around her face. She sucked on her teeth and tossed her hair back, stomping away from F-Xander and F-Willow and over to the table. She crossed her arms angrily and slammed down into a chair. "The sooner this nightmare is over with, the better," she hissed through clenched teeth. Then she started patting all the pockets in her outfit, mumbling about something.

><br>"You know, sometimes it's like we connect, and then other times it's just like we completely bounce off each other. She's so pissy. What makes slayers act as though they have PMS all the time?"

F-Xander murmured to Willow as they made their own way to the table. "Maybe the slaying?" F-Willow suggested, sitting down next to him as he pulled out two seats, across from F-Faith and far enough away from their younger selves.

><br>"Do, you, ah, think you could do the spell now?" Giles asked, fumbling for his glasses. He looked questioningly at F-Willow, and she stared blankly at him, gathering her thoughts. Xander cleared his throat loudly, nervously. F-Willow was clinging to his future self again.

><br>"Well, I would need, hmm, let us see..." she trailed off, staring at the ceiling. "I would need a bit of salt, or a bit of earth, a cup of water, a candleâ€"pepper will do, I've found that out, but oh!â€" F-Willow's eyes met with Giles', and she started to shake again slightly. "Of course, you already know what needs to be laid out on an altar. Really, all I need is some runes to cast, a crystal ball if you have one or a chalice of red wine, and a stick of sage to burn." She turned her eyes to floor. "That would be about it, really."

><br>Suddenly F-Xander gave a yelp and jumped out of his chair, sending it clattering away to the floor. He back away, one hand on the knee of his left leg, and staring beneath the table.

><br>Out materialized D-Giles, whom no one noticed had gone missing. He gave a passing glance to F-Xander, but then turned around to face

F-Willow. He rested his shaggy golden-haired head on the arm of her chair and stared at her with his deep, mournful brown eyes. They were nerving, and F-Willow scooted closer to the other side of her chair. "Yes, that's it," she said detachedly, lost in the dog's stare.

><br>"I-I'll get the materials," Willow said, backing towards the book cage where Giles kept some of her things in stash, in case they ever needed to perform a quick rite. "I know where they are." She closed the door to the cage behind her in a hurry as she flung open the place where Giles kept the weapons, and reached behind a crossbow where the makeshift altar that she had constructed for Angel's re-souling had laid untouched for awhile.

><br>"Here's an altar," Willow announced, pulling it out and dusting it off. Her red hair fell in front of her eyes and she shoved it back again with one hand, even though the board was so heavy that she had to steady it on her leg to keep herself balanced. She bumped out of the cage, carrying the altar. "There are some packets underneath thatâ€"

><br>"On no!" F-Willow cried out, jumping up and clapping a hand over her mouth, her eyes opening wide. Willow was so surprised that she dropped the board, and it made a loud crack as it split evenly in two. As Willow bent down to pick up the pieces, F-Willow started pacing towards the double doors.

><br>"Oh my goddess," she whispered, "this is so serious." She turned back to face the group, hands clasped behind her back. "Don't you see it to? Xander and I are back here, but that's because Xander cast the spell and then I touched the book it came from while it was still resonating with magickâ€"

><br>"Wait, how do you know that?" Xander asked, but F-Willow continued on over his comment and no one paid him any mind.

><br>"â€"so that's why we're here. But that does \*not\* explain why Faith and the dog are here. I mean, that dog is a puzzle unto itself. But we can only assume that since the four of us are back, then everyone else is too." Her hand appeared, and they were streaked with red marks from where F-Willow had pressed down too hard. "That means Oz, and Cordelia, and..." she let the unspoken name hang in the air, and instead concentrated on the floor. "And other people," she finished up quietly.

><br>"Then we have to go find them," F-Faith said when nobody else spoke up. "But where?"

><br>"Well, let us analyze where we ended up." F-Willow sat down on the floor, unconsciously crossing her legs yoga-style, as though she was preparing for meditation. "Faith, you...?"

><br>"Ocean," F-Faith said, hissing through her teeth again. She grabbed a bit of her hair, which had dried now and was sticky and smelled like salt. She grabbed a thick chunk between her hands and wrung it out, drops of seawater falling on the hardwood floor. "The ocean," she repeated again, wiping her hands on her leather outfit.

><br>"Ok," F-Willow said, and played around with her tongue, letting it climb up the walls and roof of her mind. For some reason, it helped her to calm down and to think. Unfortunately, it also gave her a very grotesque appearance, most of the time. "And Xander, you?"

><br>"The library, right where you found me." He put his chin on his hands and stared at F-Willow oddly. "Did Angel \*really\* 'save' you?"

><br>F-Willow rolled her eyes. "Forget the irony right now," F-Willow said. "I'm just glad someone got me out of there. I hate the

cemetery, I mean," he voice was reduced to the tiniest bit of sound. "You know how I feel about the cemetery, about what happened there." And then, with that out of her mouth, she gasped.

><br>"I have it!" She cried, leaping up. "Again, I mean, I have it again!" She walked quickly over to F-Faith. "I mean, you're terrified of the ocean, right?" F-Faith was not one to advertise her fears, and the slayer just stared back at her with dull eyes. "Ok, don't admit it, but I know the truth." As F-Willow turned around to walk near to Xander, F-Faith's eyes bore proverbial holes in F-Willow's head. "And Xander, you were in the library 'cause of...well, you know." She paused uncomfortably.

><br>"Point?" F-Xander asked, sighing loudly.

><br>"It means that we all came back to a place that we hated. Faith, the ocean. Me, the cemetery. You, the library. So basically, all the others are in places that they hate. So it will be easy to find."

><br>"That's just grand, Will," F-Xander said, standing up. He pushed that chair back in and went over to lean heavily on the banister. He wasn't feeling very good. "But just exactly where are we going to find Oz and Cordelia at? Who knows where they hate the most?"

><br>There was a moment of silence. Present and future were consumed with trying to find out where they would find the others. Then Oz walked over to F-Willow. He put a tentative hand on her shoulder, and F-Willow felt the touch of her Oz now, and she wanted to feel it again. She just had to find him and see if he was ok.

><br>"Um, I think I might know where I am," he said quietly. Then his eyes made the slightest flick towards Xander and Willow, and suddenly it clicked with everyone where exactly they could find Oz.

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><br>"Okay...what exactly is going on here?"

><br>This was definitely not his balcony, not his house, and not even \*Mexico\*. Or, maybe, it was. Just an underground part.

><br>This place was dark and gray and full of dust. As Oz ran his long, thin fingers across the wall, the plaster crumbled at the touch of his fingertips. The whole place was rotting away, and a distinct smell was in the air...matchsticks? Yes, but faintly. Old, used matchsticks, and the fire that resulted from it.

><br>But this was not the only familiar smell. Oz, using his werewolf sense of smell, could detect the residual emotions left in this place, just like Willow could use her empathy to know who was the last owner of whatever she held in her hand. He could smell, in this small hole that he was, he could smell fear, panic, a tang of death, betrayal, and remorse. Pretty powerful smell for such a small place, and such a strong imprint.

><br>Then Oz smelled something else. "Willow?" he whispered aloud, noticing her scent on the dead air. There was no answer, for the scent was stale. Stale and old, and strange, yet familiar. Something was up.

><br>Up...Oz walked over to where he saw a hole in the ceiling, and looked up. Through the jagged opening he could see another ceiling, not too far away, and the faint outline of stairs. He was under the stairs. Plaster cracked under his feet as he stood on tiptoe and tried to peer over the hole, in case there was something there to surprise him that had the ability to trick him. But there was no one there that he could see. He would have to take a risk.

><br>He was just about to spring up there when he heard a shriek from behind, and he jumped right out of the hole without even thinking. He



caught his left foot on a sharp edge of the hole, and he fell flat on his face. Getting up on his elbows, he dragged himself up to his knees and crawled as close as he could to the hole.  
><br>He looked down, and as soon as he saw who had shrieked, dropped back into the hole.

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><br>She was just going to tell Xander about a doodling Annie had done the other day (she had drawn a wonderful picture of the whole family that was so lovingly detailed for a three-year-old) when she felt his hand grow icy. Now, it was cold outside, with it having snowed only a morning ago, but one of things that she loved about Xander was that he was always warm, no matter what temperature. She had turned from looking at the stores on the other side of the road to tell Xander to put on his gloves when she noticed that he had disappeared, and that she was lying down on the ground with a tremendous headache.

><br>Cordelia blinked and stretched her face, trying to lift her head off of the floor. Her hair had come undone from its high, fancy bun, and the shoulder-length chocolate-colored strands stuck to her scalp in sweat. She reached a hand up to the back of her head to see if there was blood, if she had hit anything.

><br>When she felt no dampness, she lay her head back down and turned to the right. She found herself staring at her rusty reflection.

><br>"Wha..." Cordelia started, propping herself up on her elbows quickly. The blood rushed to her head, either of the sudden change in position or because of the sudden fright that overtook her. As she stared at the pole in front of her, the pole that still had dried blood in all the right places, she shrieked.

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><br>"Cordelia, it's me, Oz!" he called as he slid down underneath the stairs. Cordelia was sobbing now, and as soon as Oz came near her she attached herself firmly to his body. "Oh God," she mumbled, burying her head in his shoulder. Oz, glad that she didn't question what he was doing here or where here was, wrapped his arms around her and hummed soothingly, something he did when Willow got like this.

><br>"It's ok, it's ok..." he sang softly. He wondered about Willow, but right now he had to worry about Cordelia. "What made you scream?"

><br>Cordelia pulled back from him and looked at him. Her body language and expression read "stunned." "That," she said, turning around and pointed with one shaking finger towards the pole in the center of the room. "That pole. I was...impaled on that pole. I..." She didn't finish her sentence, just stared at the pole in silence.

><br>Oz looked at it. He couldn't smell the blood, and that worried him. Maybe it was all the dust in the room. But then a bigger worry hit him.

><br>"We're in the factory," he said, surprised the words were even leaving his mouth. He thought it wouldn't work, considering the total chaos his mind was currently undergoing.

><br>"The factory?" Cordelia asked, her voice thick because her tongue only moved slightly. "But how the...I mean, is it...what's going on, Oz?" she asked. "What am I \*doing\* here." She turned towards him, her eyes dancing in fright. "What are \*you\* doing here?"

How, why did we get here?"

><br>"I don't know," Oz answered truthfully, "but I think that if we go up \*there\*," he pointed to the hole's opening, "then we might find out."

><br>"But the factory is in Sunnydale," Cordelia said, her voice a soft panic. "And you know how Sunnydale is. Five seconds outside and we're the victims of a vampire suckfest. Uh-huh." She shook her head fiercely, and the strands of her hair flew free from her scalp. "I'd rather stay here."

><br>"Would you like me to go up there or do you want me to stay up here?" Oz asked, walking over to Cordelia and putting an arm on her shoulder. Cordelia raised her hand to meet his, and they smiled at each other. Oz was so sweet and considerate, and she was happy that he and Willow had gotten back together and everything. Back together even after that pushing-everybody-away thing she went through after Sunnydale had gone down in ashes.

><br>"I don't know," Cordelia said, tightening her hold on his hand. "But you're the one with the super-hyped senses. You tell me, wolf-guy."

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><br>Oz was in the front seat, hands gripped tightly on the steering wheel, which had become slipping from his sweat. Next to him, in the other front seat, Willow said with her hands in her lap and staring at the window. Each of them were too uncomfortable to look at each other, much less sneak some looks in their general direction. The fact that Oz was called the Factory the place he most hated weighed incredible guilt on Willow's part and unpleasant memories on Oz's part. And he thought he had gotten over the whole jealous-of-Xander thing, and then Willow had to turn around and go do \*that\* with Xander. Oz sighed outloud.

><br>"Are we there yet?" F-Xander called from the back, where he was scrunched up against a stack of old records, covered in black cloth and some stale Dorito chips Oz had eaten back there and forgotten to clean up. Next to him sat his younger self, who kept staring at his older self. F-Xander tried to ignore him.

><br>"Almost," Oz answered in an odd voice. Willow shifted in her seat and stared out the window a little bit harder.

><br>"You sound like an impatient little kid," F-Willow told him, her voice clear in Oz's ear because she was propped up against his seat. Next to her sat Buffy, who had come along in case any vampire activity showed up. "Are you \*that\* anxious to get there?"

><br>"No," F-Xander said with all seriousness. "You know what happened there."

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>Willow frowned. "Hmm," she grumbled, musing over something. <br>

>There was a pause, and then F-Xander turned towards Xander. "So what's up?" he asked, not wanting to make F-Willow feel too uncomfortable. <br>

>Xander looked back at him, his gaze not wavering. "You mean you don't know?" he asked, his voice a bit icy. <br>

>F-Xander shrugged. "I suppose I do," he said, then look at F-Willow. "Guess I forgot." <br>

>F-Willow leaned towards her younger self and stage-whispered, "He's forgetting things because he's getting old." Then she giggled and wiggled her eyebrows at F-Xander. <br>

>"I am not old!" F-Xander said indignantly. He looked around, and as

he knocked his shoulder on the stack of old records, the few Doritos fell in his lap. He picked one up and threw it at F-Willow. "Am not." <br>

>"Are too!" F-Willow shot back, and then bent over to pick up the chip, which had landed at her feet. She gathered it with her fingers and then threw it at F-Xander, hitting his stomach. "You are \*so\* old. You can't even hit me!" <br>

>She was answered by a Dorito right between the eyes. "Am not." <br>

>"Are too!" Dorito to the chest. <br>

>"Not!" Dorito to the chest, sliding into the bodice of her nightgown. Laughter. "I do have good aim, don't I?" <br>

>At that comment, F-Willow extended her leg and kicked F-Xander's foot "Say that in front of Oz, and he'll beat you up," she warned playfully, settling back into her seat. F-Xander put on an expression of mock horror. <br>

>{I'd better} Oz thought angrily, and then realized that they were in front of the Factory. His foot slammed down on the brake pedal, and all of the van's occupants lurched forward. <br>

>"What was that?" Buffy demanded angrily. Something that once was a hat had slid off F-Xander's stack and landed on her head. She peeled it off and put it on the floor next to her. Oz didn't turn around, just turned the key and off went the engine. He climbed out of the car, muttering "Sorry" loud enough for them to hear. <br>

>"That was wrong," F-Xander said as everyone else stayed in the van. "That \*felt\* wrong." F-Willow threw another Dorito at him, giggled that he had better shape up, and then crawled across the van to open the doors. <br>

>As the van door opened and everyone tumbled out, Oz went around back for a moment to collect himself. Sure, he felt emotions, just like any other human being did. But he was \*not\* good at showing them, or more close to the target, he was afraid of showing them. Like that little scene just now in the van, when he had slammed down on the brakes in anger. What if someone had gotten hurt? What if \*Willow\* had gotten hurt? <br>

>{I wish Xander would get hurt. I wish I could hurt him as bad as he hurt me. I hope he never sees Cordelia again, because he deserves to be without her. He deserves to be alone. Now that would hurt him.} <br>

>"Oz?" He turned around to see Willow right next to him. Her voice was quavering. "can we talk?" <br>

>"Uh, is there time?" Oz asked. On the other side of the van, someone was slamming the doors shut again. <br>

>"Short talk," Willow assured him. Then she averted her eyes, settling on the ground. "So this is the spot you most hate?" she asked softly, half-knowing the answer Oz would give her. <br>

>"Well, we'd, uh, have to go inside and see." Oz could see that the answer didn't cut it for her. "Look, Willow, I'm not hating you. I mean, I could never hate you. 'Cause your...well, your Willow, and I love you. <br>

>"But, I do hate Xander, and I hate what you did. That hurt me a \*lot\*. I mean, I've liked girls before, but I've never \*loved\* a girl, and I \*know\* that's what you I feel for you. Love, is what I feel for you." She was looking into his eyes again, and now Oz had to push his away. "And I thought you loved me back, but I'm thinking...that while you were cheating with Xander, and I told you I loved you, and you said it back to me...I'm wondering if you meant it. 'Cause for all I know, you were telling the same thing to Xander. And the way you two were on that bed." He drew in a sharp breath.

"You guys must've said that to each other already." <br>  
>When he looked back, Willow's eyes were brimming with tears. "I do love you, Oz," she said quietly, "and I keep kicking myself over the head for doing what I did with Xander. And I can't believe I had the \*nerve\* to stand like that and tell you I love you while I was...cheating on you. But I know why I did that." She waited until Oz lifted his head up to continue. "I did that because I love you, with all my heart and soul and...you know, that other stuff that people say when they're in love. And I thought I had that with Xanderâ€"for such a long timeâ€"until you came and showed me what love was really all about." She gave a little smile. "And you hear what I said. It seems that we kind of worked things out." <br>  
>Oz didn't smile just yet, but he relaxed. "Yeah, I guess so." Then he let out that sharp breath he had taken. "You know what, Willow? I love you." <br>  
>Willow beamed. "I love you too, Oz." And she meant it with all her heart and soul and...that other stuff. <br>  
>Now he smiled. <br>  
>"Hey, lovebirds?" They turned around to see Buffy standing there. "Um, Xander and Willowâ€"I guessâ€"are waiting out there for you guys to wrap it up." Her mouth made one straight line, a sign that meant she was in a hurry. She knew that once they got Oz, they would have to look for Cordelia next. And then, last but not least...herself. <br>  
>Creepy. <br>  
>"O-ok," Willow said, nodding her head. "We're there." Oz reached out for her hand, and she took it. Together they followed Buffy out into the open. <br>  
>F-Xander and F-Willow were engrossed in an argument: F-Xander was holding tightly onto her arm and Willow was struggling to get out of his tight grip. "Let me \*go\*, Xander!" she was telling him. "Somebody's got to go in there." <br>  
>"Not you. Don't you remember the last time somebody was in there? That person got impaled." <br>  
>"Oh ho, I remember that being under some different circumstances," F-Willow said, arching her eyebrows and rising on tiptoe so that she looked taller. "I'm not going to run out of there because I caught my boyfriend cheating with his best friend." <br>  
>"You know, I seem to remember you being a crucial part in that little fix too." <br>  
>"Oh yeah, well, you were a bigger part than me!" <br>  
>"Oh really? How so?" <br>  
>Willow made an arrogant "hmmf" sound. She made goo-goo eyes at Xander and made her voice sound young and sing-song. "That we're old, old friends. Just very good friends who like to hang out, and can I kiss your earlobe?" Both of them set their jaws at the same time, looking like they were gonna claw each other's eyes out. <br>  
>F-Xander stood his ground. "You're still not going in there." <br>  
>"Well then, Mr. Caution Man, since it's so dangerous, who are you gonna send in there?" <br>  
>"I dunno, little Ms. Resort-to-the-Black-Arts. How about Buffy?" F-Xander suggested, the slightest hint of cruelty evident in his voice. <br>  
>Willow's eyes widened and she made an "ah!" sound. "Well, aren't we the little hypocrite," she started sharply, ready to launch into a lecture. <br>  
>Xander and Willow exchanged nervous glances. "Uh," Willow the peacemaker started, but she was cut off by a sudden, familiar shout

of: <br>

>"So this is \*Willow's\* fault? Why does everything that happens to me in this Factory has to be because of \*Willow\*!" <br>

>F-Xander and F-Willow looked at each other, understanding passing between them, and they both ran into the Factory at once. <br>

>"\*Finally\*," Xander sighed as he and the rest of the gang followed close behind.<br>

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>Oz was trying to explain to Cordelia that this might be the indirect cause of a spell he, Willow, and Echo where doing the day before, but only so much could enter Cordelia Harris' head at once. She only heard the words "Willow" and "spell." <br>

>"So this is \*Willow's\* fault?" she fumed. "Why does everything that happens to me in this Factory has to be because of \*Willow\*." Oz imagined that there was smoke coming out of her ears, and he tried not to let a smile appear on his face from the comical mental image. <br>

>"Cordelia, calm down," he soothed. "Listen to e-ver-y-thing I sayâ€" " <br>

>"Oz!" "Cordelia?" <br>

>The two separate voice rang out in the emptiness of the factory. "Down hereâ€"wait, we'll be up there in a second!" Oz called out, recognized the voices of Xander and Willow. He was glad to see themâ€"if they were stuck in Sunnydale and they were alive, then there was a chance of getting out of this town living and breathing and to find a way out of whatever mess they were in. <br>

>"Oz?" It was Xander's voice, lined with worry. "Is Cordelia down there with you?" <br>

>"Yes I am!" Cordelia answered for herself, and Oz winced at the volume. "And Alexander Harris, you better explain what the \*hell\* is going on when I get up there! Both to Oz and me!" <br>

>"I promise, Cordy," Xander called from up above. Cordelia relaxed at the sound of her husband's voice. <br>

>"Hey!" Oz yelled up at Xander. "I'll hoist her up there, and you grab her arms, ok? You don't have to crawl up there. And Willow?" <br>

>"Yeah?" Her voice was small and sounded like bells. <br>

>"I'll be up right after Cordy, ok?" No answer. "Everything's fine, baby. I'm here." <br>

>The answer was a very soft murmur of "I know." <br>

>Oz paused for a moment to mull over Willow's strange comment, and then shrugged it off. He grabbed Cordelia by the waist and lifted her clear over his head. He noticed that Xander had hold of her arms because Cordelia's body went taut. He pushed her up as Xander pulled and didn't let go until his hands slipped off her shoes. Then, making sure the hole was cleared, he bent his leg muscles and then let them loose, jumping out of the hole. <br>

>The scene before him so stunned him that he practically fell back down again.<br>

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>What was he expecting? It was hard to put it into words. Maybe...a taller version of him. Yes, that was one thing that he was expectingâ€"hoping was a more aptly put word, actually. And maybe he'd have gotten his grown spurt, and not be so damn lanky. And maybe he'd be able to keep his hair color just one shade, and maybe he'd

have finally grown a real goatee instead of fuzz. Maybe. <br>

>Sadly, his hopes were dashed. If the gang had thought both Willow's looked alike, past Oz and Future Oz could be mistaken for twins. <br>

>They both were rather short; They both were lanky, although F-Oz was slightly thinner; Oz's hair a dulled brown (his original color) and F-Oz's a reddish-brown; they both had fuzz that half-passed for goatees or just the inability to shave. Oz was disappointed. <br>

>F-Oz was floored. <br>

>"Ok, is anybody \*else\* seeing double?" F-Oz asked. F-Willow turned towards him and her arm slinked around his back. Needing some sense of security himself, he hung his arm about her shoulders and pulled her close, like they had been doing on the balcony just minutes ago. Except...no jacket. Darn, he had liked that jacket, he'd had it forever; but he loved Willow more and was worried more about losing her than a half-replaceable jacket. <br>

>He noticed that she was shivering, and he wrapped another arm around her. F-Willow hugged him and they looked like one person. It was sweet. <br>

>"Yeah," F-Xander sighed, holding his own wife in his arms. "You see, seems my younger self decided to transport all of us back to the past as a 'fluke accident', and we're here, so we're stuck here until we can find a way back." He looked at F-Oz, waiting to see what he would say or do. <br>

>"That's...certainly something," F-Oz said, grasping for the right words and finding none. <br>

>"And who says things change?" Xander muttered under his breath. Buffy overheard him and flashed him grin, which he sent right back. He was watching F-Xander holding what he was pretty damn sure was F-Cordelia. And however elating, it was also strange and confusing. He had the feeling that an explanation wasn't coming his way any time soon. <br>

>"So, you're saying we're in the past...?" F-Cordelia said, her voice showing a surprising strength. Xander looked down at her, and she tilted his head up. Her nose met with his chin when they stood like that. "Oh. Ohmigod." <br>

>"We're not in Kansas anymore," Oz noted, shaking his head at what was going on. <br>

>"Yeah, well, thanks for the brilliant observation, Toto," Cordelia shot back harshly, and Oz flinched. "I'm sorry," she quickly apologized, and then brought a hand to her forehead. "Ohmigod, this is just too much..." She turned to look at everyone in the room, and as soon as her eyes landed on Buffy she whipped Xander around and began a heated and muted conversation. <br>

>Willow and Oz just stared at the almost-identical couple. They were moving their mouths as though they were speaking to each other, but no sound whatsoever came out. They went like this for awhile, everyone explaining what they were going through, and then F-Cordelia let out a long, "Oh, I get it now. But if I get the chance, I'm still gonna claw her eyes out." <br>

>"If Cordelia gets it, I get it," F-Oz whispered to his wife, and she giggled. <br>

>"Well," Buffy said, spinning a stake idly in her hands. There were no vampires tonight, and she just wanted to get the next pick-up over with. She knew she was next, and she knew exactly where she was. "Um, so now what?" Oz asked, and they all turned to look towards Buffy, who obviously would take over as the leader of the group. <br>

>"Well, I know where I am," Buffy said, trying to keep her voice flat and emotionless, like Faith often did. For all she knew, she might not even be alive still. "I definitely know the place I most hate."  
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>"The place you most hate? Wait..." F-Oz looked between Buffy and F-Willow, and then Oz and Willow. F-Willow's grip tightened and she nodded in affirmation. They traded meaningful looks. <br>

>F-Xander turned a strange shade of purple, and then looked away from F-Cordelia. F-Cordelia noted his awkwardness and pushed away her own. She grabbed his chinâ€"stubble, Jesus, didn't the man ever take time to shave?â€"and looked unwaveringly into his eyes. "I forgive you," she told him low and sternly, "and don't you dare think otherwise." F-Xander gave her a wane smile, and she kissed him lightly on the mouth. <br>

>Xander almost let out an audible sigh. {Cordelia and I...back together? But if we're back together, how? The only talking she does to me now is to put me down, I can't believe she'd actually forgive me, and I want to be kissing her right now instead of my other self kissing her. It's no fair that I have to wait that long. Even though it's my fault that I have to wait.} <br>

>"So we go get...Buffy, next?" F-Cordelia asked, after she was done making sure her husband knew she held no grudge. She looked towards the younger generation with her typical "So, am I right?" look. <br>

>"Well, yeah," Buffy said, itching to get out of this Factory and over to where she thought she'd find her future self. <br>

>"Then what are we waiting for?" F-Oz asked. In his arms, F-Willow made a small shrug. "Then let's go." <br>

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>It was a tight squeezeâ€"trueâ€"and it was a bit awkwardâ€"trueâ€"but the gang and their future selves tried to make the best of it. Meaning no one was speaking. <br>

>F-Xander and F-Cordelia had claimed the back of the van, and were sprawled in comfortable positions while engaged in a conversation that included doing some strange version of patty-cake that kept sending them into fits of giggles. Xander was leaning on the doors, looking somewhere between falling asleep and gazing with confusion at the couple playing patty-cake. Buffy was on the opposite side of the doors with knees drawn up to her chin, deep in thought. F-Oz and F-Willow were leaning on the back of Oz's seat, F-Willow in F-Oz's lap, his arms wrapped tightly around her slim waist. He was whispering Shakespeare in her ear, and she had a happy and contented look in her face. <br>

>Oz was in the front seat, trying to cope with the fact that less than a foot away stood, well, himself. In fact, he was so coping with it that it was the only thing on his mind, and he forgot the very much more important thing. <br>

>"Uh, Buffy?" Oz called into the back. Everyone looked up from their respective thoughts and activities and looked at him attentively.

"Where exactly are we going?" <br>

>Buffy's jaw dropped but said nothing. That was F-Cordelia's job. <br>

>"You mean you don't know?" she asked, her own jaw dropping.

"Where've we been driving for the past, like, fifteen minutes?" <br>

>F-Oz scooted over to where he could see out the windshield and craned his neck. "Looks like the city limits," he said, a touch of humor in his voice. <br>

>"Oh, great one," F-Cordelia said, throwing her arms up. One of them hit F-Xander in the face, and he gently grabbed her arms and placed them in her lap. "Twelve steps," he told her sternly. "Twelve steps."  
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>F-Cordelia looked at him cluelessly, and then once getting the point, she gave an exasperated sigh, crossed her arms over her chest, and turned away from him. "I \*hate\* being a better person," she grumbled, an unhappy expression on her face. <br>

>"That's funny," F-Xander said lightly, "because it seems you don't have much practice at it." F-Cordelia, astonished, turned to look at him, and then slapped him playfully on the arm. "You are such a smartass, Xander! You better be careful, or I'm gonna be serving you divorce papers." <br>

>Everyone had a good quiet laugh in the van, and Buffy was about to speak up when F-Willow reached over to her and tugged out the hat-thing she had sat on. F-Willow held it up like a trophy and then waved it in front of F-Oz's face. "We still have this!" she proclaimed proudly, and then gave him a quick kiss on the lips. <br>

>"What \*is\* it?" F-Cordelia asked, tapping her fingernails lightly on F-Xander's arm, which was slung casually around his wife's shoulders. F-Willow took one look at the hat-thing and shrugged. She looked at Oz, who shrugged in turn. <br>

>"I don't really care. I just like it a lot 'cause it earned me a kiss." Oz grinned, and the grin grew wider as Willow grinned back. Ah, she had the sweetest smile... <br>

>"I hate to break this moment," Buffy interrupted, a wistfulness evident in her voiceâ€œobviously wishing for happier timeâ€œ"but it seems our ride has stopped." <br>

>It had indeed. Oz was turned around with one arm draped over the headrest of his chair, looking over at Buffy. "So, where are we going?" he asked calmly. <br>

>"You're on the right road," Buffy assured him. <br>

>"But we're almost to the edge of Sunnydale," Willow pointed out, doubt evident in her voice. "Are you sure we're going the right way?" <br>

>"I'm sure," Buffy said confidently. "We're headed to the mansion." <br>

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>~~~~Meanwhile, back at the library, a place filled with characters the author has been ignoring thus far, and she apologizes for that very fact...~~~~ <br>

>Giles was seated at the table with the Pergamum Codex in front of him, a surefire way of figuring out what in the bloody hell was going on around here. Buffy, Xander, Willow, Oz, F-Xander, and F-Willow had gone out to round everyone else, leaving F-Faith behind to pretend to help him research. And also leaving that bloody dog here to destroy his library. <br>

>D-Giles was currently nosing his wet muzzle through some very ancient and hard-to-replace books. "Hey, get!" he told the dog. D-Giles lifted his head to look at him for a second, wet brown eyes meeting Giles', and then the dog turned back to "reading" the covers. <br>

>"Shoo!" Giles tried again, wanting to drive the dog away but not wanting to put any physical effort into it. This time, when the dog looked up at him, D-Giles gave his namesake a who-do-you-think-you-are-ordering-ME-around-like-that looks that reminded Giles too much of Cordelia to give him the power to keep a



straight face. <br>

>"Just call it by its name." Giles turned his head around and saw F-Faith leaning her chair back on two legs, one wicked-looking black boot sitting on top of the table, and the slayer herself giving it a literal spit-shine. "Call it by its name and tell it to fucking stop it. 'Shoo' ain't gonna cut it, gramps." <br>

>Giles shook his head at her dirty mouth as he turned back to face the dog, who had taken the Malleus Maleficarum by the teeth. "Giles!" he said sharply, feeling extremely ridiculous. D-Giles looked up at, surprised that this impudent stranger was commanding authority. But that's all it took: a sharp glare, the mention of his name, and a "bad dog! Don't do it again!" verse once or twice. D-Giles hung his head and jumped down from the chair in which he had perched upon, slinking away to sulk in a corner. <br>

>"Um, thank you," Giles said to F-Faith, who ignored him. He sighed and took his glasses off, running a hand nervously through his hair. <br>

>"You're welcome," F-Faith muttered, trying to see if it was true, that you could see your own reflection in your shoes if they were shiny enough. She snorted. "Bullshit." <br>

>"Pardon me?" Giles said, surprised. F-Faith took one look at him and shook her head sadly, wondering why she had to stay guard over both helpless puppies. <p><p>

## 5. Default Chapter Title

God, she loved Jonah. She really did. It really was love at first sight...

><br>She had run away from Sunnydale, again, just wanting to get away from everything she had destroyed, from everyone she had failed. This time, instead of relocating somewhere else in So Cal, Buffy took the train and wen to NYC, where she got a job as a waitress in caf   in the Village and did nights at a community college she had long since forgotten the name of. Life was hard at first, because of all he guilt she continually carried with her. But over the course of a few months she thought less and less of the happenings in Sunnydale as she settled into the routine of her brand-new life as Anne Summers, once again.

><br>She really loved working at that caf  . At first she hated it, because it was owned by some raunchy new breed of dickhead that she suspected was also a pimp, because he kept hinting that she ought to worked for him in his "other business," the one he held at night. Then, once he was arrested  "narcotics traffickers are the norm in NY, unfortunately  "his young niece inherited the shabby place.

><br>Helen  "that was the niece's name  "was a dear, sweetheart who cam from a not-so-well-to-do part of Brooklyn with a charming accent. She had pretty orange red hair and freckles that were actually flattering, and not the best body but not the worst. She had a boyfriend was had supported for 2      years while he was writing his novel, and just when Helen was going to dump him because she thought he was putting her on, he got published and made millions off his bestselling book. So this poor, dirty, smoky, gothic place was extremely below her new self, but right at home for the Brooklyn Helen, and Helen never forgot her Brooklyn self.

><br>The place was quickly decomposing on itself, falling to bits and pieces inside and out. Helen had fixed the shoddy construction in a wink, giving it a fresh look while still keeping that coffehouse, starving-artists-chronically-depressed-poets-come-here kind of place.

She had redone the interior keeping the same nostalgic look while making the place look permanently clean, and advertised the place so that they got more customers. Since her boyfriend spent the day writing his other novels and they were living just fine off his last paycheck, Helen devoted all her time to the Green Leaf Café. She hovered over everyone's shoulders and becoming good friends with the help, including Anne.

><br>In fact, Anne was Helen's mission. Helen would not leave Anne alone until she managed to open up just the tiniest bit. Helen thought that Anne was a good girl who had associated with the wrong people and just needed some good influence. Helen thought Anne needed a guy.

><br>Anne was behind the counter, wiping clean the marble blocks Helen had installed to give the place some class, Helen had snuck up behind her. Anne, startled, shrieked and jumped up, losing control of all her body parts. Her hand, flying free, knocked over a full coffee mug.

><br>and Anne watched as the dark brown liquid tipped over cup's mouth as it clattered onto the counter. The mug crashed down and rolled away, covered into the coffee. The rest of the drink spread around the counter, and write on top of the papers it had landed on.

><br>She hadn't noticed him in front of her. He was about her age, maybe a little older, as old as Angel had looked to her the first time. "no, stupid, don't think about him or anything related to Buffy" time she saw him (who?). He looked like he was in college, or should be in college, with dark black hair that desperately needed to be combed, soft pale skin, oval face, and the most intriguing set of dark green eyes, an unnatural color Anne had never seen before. He looked down at his pages of ruined manuscript, and then looked up at Anne. Anne had gulped and squeezed her eyes shut, afraid of whatever screaming and shouting session would follow. For sure she might be fired.

><br>"It's ok," he had soothed instead. Buffy had opened one eye and stared at him disbelievingly, eyebrow arching. "What, don't look at me like I'm from Mars or something." He had smiled, and that made Anne give an attempt at a laugh. "It's just a little coffee stain. It'll come out. Besides, the script wasn't winning no Pulitzer anyhow."

><br>"Script?" Anne asked, interested. "As in a script for a play, or a script for a movie?"

><br>"Movie script," he had answered. "I've realized that Broadway is far too classy for me, so I might as well make my life as one of the many leeches in the movie industry." He said this sadly, as though he regretted his choice in "careers."

><br>"Oh, there are plenty of good people out there in Hollywood," Anne had assured him, leaning her elbows comfortably on the marble counter. "No one really comes to mind just now" he cracked a smile "but there are. And I'm certain you're one of them."

><br>"Thanks so much, you really don't know what it means to have you talk to me," he said, all smiles. He looked so debonair, yet homely and nice. "I was afraid I was going to use one of those horrible pickup lines, like 'Can I have quarter? I promised I'd call my mother when I met the girl of my dreams' or 'I must have died and gone to heaven, because I'm seeing an angel before me' or" he mock-shuddered "the dread 'Have we met before?' deal. You know, all out to get the girl."

><br>Anne had laughed, and he took that as a good sign. "My name is Daniel," he said, extending his hand. Anne had taken it, shaking it

lightly and about to burst out laughing at his awkward formality.

><br>"And my name is..." Anne paused for a moment. Who did she want to be in front of Daniel? Did she want to be Anne and have a fresh start? Or did she want to take on the horrible emotional baggage brought along by calling herself Buffy. What to do...?

><br>"My name is Buffy," she said hesitantly, her hand sliding out of his firm handshake. "Buffy."

><br>Daniel's brow wrinkled. "But you tag says Anne," he said, as though Buffy had just had a memory lapse.

><br>Buffy blushed and fingered her nametag, which read ANNE in big back letters. "Yeah, I know," she admitted. "Let's just say that I though I was Anne, but I really am a person called Buffy."

><br>"Oh, I get it," Daniel said, slapping his forehead with the palm of his hand. "You moved here from somewhere, got a new name, and decided you were gonna get a whole new start on life. But then you decided to be who you really were." Buffy was taken aback by his rudeness, but his following comments made sense. "You are much more of a man than I am, Buffy." He held out his hand, and Buffy took it again, this time shaking it a bit more firmly. "I might as well...my name is Jonah. It's very nice to meet you, Buffy,"

><br>"Charmed," Buffy said, looking up into Jonah's green eyes. She smiled dreamily. "Very, very charmed."

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><br>Now Buffy had gathered the covers and comforter from the floor and draped them motheringly over her sleeping husband. She then proceeded to slip in one his side and cuddle up next to his warm body. She felt his breath hot on her neck, and then his arm slid around her waist.

><br>"Oh, you're \*up\*, you dick!" Buffy teased, jutting Jonah in his stomach. Gosh he had gorgeous abs. Jonah just chuckled and drew her tighter.

><br>"I just wanted to hold you," he said, nibbling on her ear and stroking her hair. Buffy smiled and snuggled closer to her husband, sighing contently. She and Jonah hadn't grown apart during their many years of marriage. They had made sure that they were in love before they had tied the knot. She remembered finding out that she was pregnant with Elisabeth Sarah so soon, but both she and Jonah had agreed that they would wait a bit longer to see if they really loved each other, because they just didn't want to do "the right thing." They wanted to do "the right thing," but to do it with love. Thank God they had had love, and they were able to give Elisabeth Sarah love.

><br>"I love you Jonah. I love you so much." She giggled as Jonah's tongue tickled her earlobe. "Christ, Jonah, I think I might've married you just for the sex alone."

><br>"Is that a compliment or not?" Jonah teased back, his mouth moving down the contours of her neck. "I love you too," he uttered breathlessly, nibbling on her flesh. "Too, too much for my own good, Buffy."

><br>"What?" Buffy asked, finding something wrong with his tone of voice. The nibbling of her flesh was turning into biting now, and it hurt. "Jonah!" She pushed his face away with her hand, and then she definitely knew something was wrong.

><br>She looked at him in horror. His beautiful face had turned into a disgusting, demon, ugly-face vampire. At she froze with shock, he lunged towards her and grabbed her arms, burying his face in her

neck.

><br>She screamed.

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><br>After the announcement that they were heading towards the mansion, everyone in the van quieted down. The silence was suffocating and almost as loud as the conversation had been. Buffy knew that it had to deal with her, somehow, and she was very uncomfortable. But what was she to do about it?

><br>Everyone was in their own little world, and Buffy seemed to be off in hers. But what she was really doing was watching everyone else trying to guess that they were thinking.

><br>Xander had on a pained expression. He probably thought that all this was his fault, and it was just too strange for him today. He was also probably thinking about this future coupling. No doubt that things between Xander and Cordelia were not very good, although they seemed to have turned out just fine.

><br>She could make out Willow's outline from where she sat, the lamplight from outside occasionally flicking across her worn features. She looked so old there, probably thinking about her and Oz and the big empty gap between them. Probably going over and over in her head the conversation that she and Buffy had had the night before over the phone, talking about their totally messed-up relationships or lack thereof.

><br>Buffy couldn't see Oz's face, but she was damn sure what was on \*his\* mind.

><br>F-Oz and F-Willow were a puzzle. They were in the same position as before, but both of them had their heads hung low and staring blankly at some nonexistent spot on the van's rug. They seemed detached a little, but deep in thought at the same time.

><br>F-Xander was staring stonily in silence, his mouth set in one straight line, occasionally making a "harumph" of disgust, and F-Cordelia had rested her head on his shoulder. She seemed awfully tiredâ€”perhaps time-travel jet lag? Who knew? Things were strange enough as they were, Buffy could just except more weirdness.

><br>Buffy finished her analyzing rounds just as Oz pulled to a stop. "Well, here's the mansion," he said, putting the van in Park. He opened the driver side door. "Anybody coming?"

><br>Xander came back from wherever he was and snapped to attention. Tiredly, he opened the van doors and toppled outside. Yet more visitors from the future. Yay.

><br>The others followed him begrudgingly, and Buffy was beginning to suspect that things weren't all that great between her Future Self and the Future Slayerettes. {Oh God, can that be true? What could've happened...?}

><br>F-Xander was mumbling something to his wife (girlfriend? No, there were the wedding bands glinting in the darkness) and Buffy scooted closer and strained to listen with her slayer senses. It was something about her, maybe it would provide a clue to the sudden silence in the van...

><br>"...oh please, like we really need to come after that spineless little hussy. I say we leave her to fare for herself, and if she fares really, really badly, then all the better to give me a happy..."

><br>Buffy felt like stopping in her tracks, but she kept walking down the dirt path. God, what had happened to make \*Xander\* call her a spineless little hussy? Sure, they had had their past where things

weren't all too good between them, but this was unexpected. She could never be less than a goddess in his eyes, and she had always coveted that position, as much as she hated it. She \*liked\* his admiration, even if she didn't want to take it to another level. She was twisted like that.

><br>But something had happened, something \*big\* had happened to make F-Xander think of her like that. A thousand possibilities ran through Buffy's mind. And also a warning Giles had hissed to her before they had left:

><br>"Don't talk to any of them. Don't ask them any questions regarding events that have yet to happen. Knowing about your future is a very dangerous thing, and we do not want to tamper with it. We have done enough."

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><br>Angel was stretched out on the couch, half-naked with a pair of black jeans on, in the dreamy-like state of sleep for a vampire, The Brothers K lying bent open on his slowly rising and falling chest. He was dreaming, dreaming of Buffy and him during better times. Oh, how he longed for those times...

><br>And then he had felt the sudden weight on his shoulders, the proverbial breath knocked out of him if he had been human, and the feminine "oof!" that had followed. Then he had opened his eyes, and to his surprise, saw a complete stranger that wasn't that strange.

><br>And then the Buffy look-alike opened her mouth and screamed.

><br>Angel's eyes widened and his immediate reaction was to sit up. That, of course, sent the Buffy woman crashing to the floor. Angel quickly reached over to help her up, but the woman made a few squeaking noises and quickly backed away. Soon she was up against the fire place, and she reached up for the poker and held it in front of her as she climbed to her feet.

><br>"Don't you come near me," she warned, and although she tried to sound menacing there was the underlying note of fear that Angel could pick up. Immediately his vampiric senses were enthralled by her fear, but Angel fought for control.

><br>"Please, don't be afraid," he said, slowly holding his hands up and backing away from her, to show the woman that he meant no harm. She obviously did not believe him. "I don't mean any harm. If you tell me where you are from, or how you got here, then perhaps I can help you get backâ€"

><br>"Don't give me that shit!" she demanded angrily, and started to edge towards the door, her eyes flickering over her shoulder every so often so that she knew where she was going. "I don't know what you plan to do, Angel, but I \*swear\* I'm going to find it out and I'm going to kill you..."

><br>She trailed off as the sound of hurried, thumping footsteps came from just outside. She looked around, her hair swishing around her face, and then she ran towards the far wall where there was still a small pile of stakes from Buffy's last training session with her ex-lover. She completely abandoned the poker and grabbed a stake, still looking cautiously towards Angel, who was doing nothing. He was pretty confused as it was. {The next time I see Buffy I hope that she can explain all this...}

><br>"Please, Ms...." Angel tried again, holding out a tentative hand towards her. The woman just shrieked and back away from the vampire. The hand that held the stake was shaking nervously, and there were tears of frustration in the woman's eyes.

><br>"You said you'd leave me alone, you said you'd leave me alone," she told him, trying hard to control her voice. "You \*lied\*. I'm surprised I even believed you, I can't believe I was \*fool\* enough to believe you..."

><br>The thumping footsteps were right outside now, and the woman took one last look at Angel before darting out of the room, running down the corridor to try and find another way out.

><br>The woman had just disappeared out of view when the Slayerettes, present and future, entered the room. Buffy was at the lead, and she skidded to a halt right in front of Angel, looking around wildly.

><br>"Where is she? Where did I go?" Buffy asked impatiently, still looking around. Angel looked at Buffy, at the corridor, and then swallowed. "Um, she went down there...he said, motioning to the corridor with his eyes. He swallowed again. "Um, could someone please explain this situation to me?"

><br>Buffy ignored him and walked towards the corridor with quick, decisive steps, the heels of her shoes clicking on the floor's surface. "Hey...you! Come back!" she yelled into the hall. When she got no answer, she turned back to the Slayerettes. "Do I go after her?" she asked a little uncertainly.

><br>F-Xander rolled his eyes and sighed. They turned to look at him as he stepped up besides Buffy and cupped his hands around his mouth. "BUFFY!" he yelled into the corridor, and Angel winced at the yell as it racked his sensitive hearing. From the corner of his eyes, he could see Oz...or what looked like Oz in very rumpled clothes, squinch his eyes shut and wince also.

><br>There was a dead silence, then the soft sound of bare feet hitting floor. "Xander?" came the shaky voice.

><br>"Who the hell else?" Xander called back. No reply. "Are you coming out here or not?"

><br>More soft thuds, and closer this time. "But..."

><br>"He's not who you think he is," Xander sighed. "Thank God. Just get out of here so we can get the hell back to the library and get all this mess done. You're holding us back...figures."

><br>Willow, Xander, and Oz traded looks. The underlying hostility is Xander's voice was rapidly becoming overlying hostility. What was this?

><br>That last comment did it. F-Buffy stormed out, stake at her side, hair flowing behind her, and her face tilted down and eyes glaring. "The hell does that mean..." Her voice trailed off as she came to a halt, realizing that she was standing right before herself.

><br>Time seemed to stop. Both Buffys stopped breathing, her chests tightening and hearts leaping up into their throats. Beautiful green eyes became large pools of light as they looked into each other, seeing a mirrored reflection. Little curved noses wrinkled in confusion and soft, full red lipsticked lips quavered and then settled into a frown. Both Slayers lost hold of the stakes in their hand, and they fell to the floor with a loud clatter, which brought them back crashing to reality.

><br>"Oh, oh, oh, oh, \*no\*," F-Buffy said, shaking her head quickly. She backed away from Buffy slowly, shaking her head and speaking with fake laughter. "This could not \*possibly\* happen to me, no, no, no, not after all this time...why?"

><br>"'Cause that's how it is," F-Xander said matter-of-factly, shoving his hands into his pockets and letting out another sigh. He turned around to look at F-Cordelia, who just shrugged and mouthed the word "actresses."

><br>As F-Buffy's gaze went from Buffy to F-Xander, her eyes hardened into jade stones. "Xander," she said, her voice dripping with acid. "What an annoyance to see you again. I wouldn't be a bit surprised if all this had some connection to do you."  
><br>"The annoying feeling is mutual." F-Xander took his left hand out of his pocket and pointed to her hair. "Buffy...love the hair. And the shirt...the whole get-up's doing \*nothing\* for your figure. Or is it some kind of new Hollywood sheik I should become aware of?"

><br>F-Buffy stifled an annoyed laugh in her throat and shook her head. "Xander, Xander...and we all know the fashion gods bow down and pray to \*you\*. I mean, look." She motioned towards his outfit, and then to Angel, who had backed considerably back to his sofa. "I mean, we all know who's closet \*you\* raided this morning."

><br>F-Xander was about to spit something equally mean back to her when F-Willow cleared her throat loudly. F-Xander and F-Buffy broke their smoldering glares at each other to look at F-Willow. "Down," she told them firmly, looking straight at F-Xander. "Let's just go back to the library and you two can solve your squabble over in the future, preferably the hell away from me so I don't have to hear you to go at it. Ok?"

><br>F-Buffy and F-Xander didn't respond, but looked at each other silently. Then F-Xander, rolling his eyes, walked right out the mansion mumbling about actresses under his breath. Buffy just glared after him.

><br>"Oh yeah, and federal lawyers are a bunch of princes!" she retorted loudly, and F-Xander called her an English swearword from out of view.

><br>F-Buffy turned back to her self, and no one knew what to say. F-Buffy threw her hands impatiently in the air. She had no idea how to treat this situation she was in, and she opted for anger because it blocked all other emotions and rationale from her mind.

><br>"So, are we going or not? Or are we all gonna stand here and stare at me like I'm an alien from some other planet. 'Cause \*you\* guys are the weirdos here, ok?"

><br>No one spoke. This biting, spiteful version of Buffy had yet to be revealed in her present self, and it was quite a shock to everyone. F-Cordelia had run off after F-Xander, and now F-Willow and F-Oz shrugged and followed in suit. F-Buffy took one look at the younger generation, made an exasperated sound, and walked out with her head down and muttering to herself in F-Xander-fashion.

><br>That left Generation-X behind. Xander smacked his lips and went "Well." Willow nodded in agreement to his short blurb of words. Buffy was left speechless, and Angel walked over to lay a comforting hand on her shoulder, which quickly turned into a comforting hug.

><br>"May I take this moment of silence," Oz said, balancing his words carefully. Everyone turned to look at him. "Just to say that this is some very, very weird shit that is going on here."

><br>His audience bobbed their heads like a dutiful congregation, listening to their priest speaking the True Words of God.

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><br>"Aw, \*SHIT\*!"

><br>The sharp cry came exploding out of the bookcases, and startled Giles to the point where he lost his grip on "The Tiberius

Manifesto." As the heavy yet flimsy book slid out of his hands, he quickly bent over to catch it. He managed to grab the back cover and a few pages in the middle, succeeding only in ripping the fragile book in two. As the now freed pages fluttering down to the floor, Giles spoke an oath of his own and bent to his knees, scrambling around desperately to gather the ancient sheets.

><br>There was the heavy stomping of boots, and then a poke in his side. Giles set his mouth into a grim line and made sure his temper was under control. He rolled back on his heels and put a hand on his knees, looking up. F-Faith. He should have known.

><br>"What exactly may I do for you, Faith?" Giles asked, his voice showing his annoyance.

><br>"Prophecy," F-Faith said simply, crossing her arms and looking down at him. When he began to make some signs of moving to stand up, she marched on over to the table and sat down heavily in the nearest chair.

><br>"What prophecy?" Giles asked, wincing as he carefully stepped over the mess that was once the "Manifesto." "Could this help in explainingâ€" "

><br>"â€"yeah, yeah, it could explain why all of us future people are back in the past," F-Faith filled in quickly. "My last Watcher told it to me," she spoke as Giles pulled out a chair for him to sit in, "at least, she told me what she could before I got rid of her."

><br>"Um, 'got rid of her'?" Giles inquired, not sure exactly what he was asking for.

><br>"Yeah, got rid of her." F-Faith noticed he really didn't get it, so sighing, she bent over the table and scooted her chair in. "You see, I'm not all that big on authority figures. I pretty much despise them, in fact. And a Watcher is an authority figure and one of the worst. So, whenever one manages to corner me and proclaims themselves the boss of me, I devise some kind of way to torture them and then head for the freakin' hills.

><br>"The first time I got rid of a Watcher was right after I'd left Sunnydale after, uh, somethin' happened. Anyway, I was up in Mississippi working on the river as a boatlady, ya know, enjoying life pretty much, and then this kid barely out of high school comes up and says he's my Watcher, and he's gonna be ordering me around for the rest of life. I, of course, have none of it. Three days later, he's tied to a raft, naked, and ridin' down the Mississippi River, with a buncha people gawking and a bunch of little children throwing sticks and stones. I gave it to him good." She noticed a flash of alarm in Giles' eyes, and decided she liked it. "And you know, I still use that technique, too, whenever I'm near a relatively large body of water. I like to call it 'skinnin'."

><br>"So, just a month ago this lady comes up to me and says she's my Watcher. And you know, word gets around at what a bitchy, temperamental Slayer I am, so she was pretty frightened. I liked that she was scared and constantly on edge, and she also offered me a place to sleep and food to eat, so I frickin' put up with her. But then she kept getting on my nerves, over and over and over again. I was tired of her, \*so\* tired of her. When she told me there was a prophecy, I waited to here enough of it, and then lead her out for 'training' in a not-so-secluded part of a local forest. She's resting after I've totally annihilated her, and then I take her by surprise. I tie her up to this branch far enough away from the ground so that her feet aren't touching it but if she falls off (which I rigged it so that she'd slip out of her chains after awhile) she won't get \*too\* hurt. Then I give her some headphones blaring bad 70s American rock, which she hates with a fiery passion."



><br>F-Faith started a slow smile. "You know, that was kinda fun. Maybe I'll try that again with another stuffy British bitch, when I get the chance."

><br>Giles gulped and flushed as he thought of F-Faith or Buffy "skinnin'" him. He quickly chased that picture of his mind, least he dwell too long on it. He cleared his throat loudly. "And about this prophecy?" he prompted.

><br>"Oh, yes," F-Faith said, hitting herself on the forehead with the palm of her hand. "I can't believe I forgot about it so long. 'Cause you see, my Watcher, Gladys, has got this book called, oh, what was it? 'Argentum Interfector', I think it was?"

><br>"The Silver Slayer?" Giles asked, quickly drawing his breath. F-Faith shrugged and nodded her head. "My God. Complete prophecies for centuries and centuries of female slayers." Amazed, he took off his spectacle and loosened his hold, letting the spectacles dangle precariously by the tips of his fingers. "Where did she get the book? A-actually, what volume?"

><br>"How the hell should I know?" F-Faith asked, sending him a dirty look. "Listen, Slayers slay, and Watchers read books about slaying. Ok? That's how you play the game, and you can only be on one team and once. So why should I care what volume the hell that Gladys was reading?" The sharp and direct way that F-Faith had of speaking made Giles extremely glad that Buffy was his slayer, and that Faith pretty much Watched herself.

><br>"Anyway," F-Faith grumbled, leaning back into her chair. She swung one leg over the other in a very male position. Her entire attitude and the way she carried herself screamed 'Mess with me, prepared to be disemboweled '. "The prophecy went just like this:

><br>"The Chosen Ones, the Slayers Four

>Shall be baptized in Devil's blood<br>Death after Death, Life taking Life

>Time into Time, Hell upon Earth."<br>

>Giles was absolutely stunned. He leaned back in his chair and looked at F-Faith with wild eyes. "That sounds...that sounds apocalyptic," he finally managed to stutter, taking in the prophecy. <br>

>Behind them all, D-Giles stopped ripping apart his new-found chew toystamp pad and padded over to where the humans were. He came up to Giles and place his red-and-blue, wet, matted fur and snout on his namesake's knee. Giles looked down at him, and D-Giles looked up at him with soulful, sympathetic eyes. Giles again wondered why the dog was here.

><br>"Apocalyptic, hmm," F-Faith mused, putting one slim finger to her chin. "Well, I guess if you look at it from that angle..."

><br>"What other angles are there to look at?" Giles asked. "'Hell upon Earth'," he quoted the prophecy.

><br>"Well, yeah, that could mean the end of the world." F-Faith paused for a moment. "So what? Are we suppose to prevent it or something? Why?"

><br>Giles practically toppled out of his chair. It could be the end of the world as they knew it, and F-Faith wanted to know 'so what?'. If they were suppose to 'prevent it?'. 'Why?' they should prevent it? "Yes, of course we should prevent it. I-it's our duty. A-and there are m-many good reasons as to why the world should continue on." Giles stopped there. "Ah, wellâ€"

><br>"Oh please, stop it," F-Faith said, shaking her head and breaking into a sardonic grin. "I mean, there is like, zero reasons as to why the world should continue on the way it is, and every reason for the apocalypse to happen. I mean, there's that 86Z thing,

Bill Gates (who just \*refuses\* to die), Sandra Lewinsky, that Sakash Arven clone, that Nuclear Winter thing they have going on in China...I mean, mankind has seriously screwed up Earth. Maybe demons can run the White House a helluva lot better than James Betrich and his little gang of government conspirators."

><br>Giles looked at her blankly. F-Faith stared back at him with the exact strange expression, and then she got it. Her hand flew up to her mouth, and she cursed loudly. "Damn, I shouldn't have said all that," she said, closing her eyes and mouthing the words 'stupid, stupid, STUPID!'. Then she opened her eyes and removed the hand from her mouth, done humiliating herself. She looked at Giles, who was still a bit surprised. "Don't worry, G. It's not like you'll have to know that stuff anyway."

><br>Another blank expression. "Best to forget that I said that," F-Faith said quickly, shaking her head in agreement with herself. Giles just sighed, and D-Giles blew air through his nose. Giles looked down and saw the dog looking back at him, and something eerie flashed through his eyes.

><br>Giles wondered why everything strange and weird always had to happen to him.

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><br>Nicholas McLeary was sitting at the dining room table, idly munching on a sugar cookie and staring off into the distance. Next to him, his littler sister Annie Harris was doing the same thing, except Nicholas' cookie was half-eaten and Annie's cookie was still whole and covered in slobber. As much as he loved his sister, Nicholas didn't like to be around her when she had food in her hand, because it quickly became a mess to be cleaned up or a projectile heading for something that would later be needing a clean-up. This time, though, Annie was being relatively neat, so he allowed her to sit next to him and stare off into space, an activity Nicholas did often and that Annie like to join in too, when there was nothing else to do.

><br>In the same room but far enough so that Nicholas felt ok sat Julie and Josh, his step-brother and step-sister, playing a demented version of Trouble. He liked Julie and Joshâ€"sometimes. He liked Julie when she was alone, 'cause she was really funny and could be sweet around Annie and stuff. But when she was around Josh she was all the tom-boy girl, and she was that way around Xander, too. Around Mommy she was a girl a lot, though. Yeah.

><br>Josh was a boy, and he was Xander's favorite, no doubt. Nicky could never live up to him anyhow, because Josh was Xander's real son and Nicky was just someone in the way, no matter how much everyone tried to make him a big part of the family. Josh was rowdy and rude and loud, but he was very, very defensive of his sisters. NOBODY touched Julie or Annie when he was there, especially Julie. In fact, he and Julie were very strange. They always seemed to know stuff about each other, and they were just so close. Nicky often wondered what it was like, having a twin, and he used to ask that of Josh all the time. But Josh would just shrug and said he didn't know, what was it like \*not\* being a twin? Nicky couldn't answer that question, so the conversation just kind of laid there and died, and then Josh would go off and play with Julie and Nicky would go off to find Annie and do s' more silent thinking. That happened a lot.

><br>Sometimes he and Annie were like Julie and Josh. Like, Annie couldn't speak, but if she wanted something, Nicky just knew 'cause he knew so much about her. Like a while back, they were grocery

shopping and were in the cookie aisle. Annie hated hard cookies 'cause they were harder to get in her mouth than the soft ones, and Ms. Natalie had soft ones and she wanted soft ones. So Mommy was holding up every bag in the aisle and Annie was starting to cry when Nicky said, "I think she wants the soft cookies, Mommy," and Nicky was right.

><br>Unfortunately, Ms. Natalie hadn't bought the soft cookies this time around and Annie was getting very agitated at the cookie. Nicky planned to ignore her until she started to cry or to scream, 'cause there wasn't much you could do until then. So he went back to thinking.

><br>Xander wasn't really so bad. He wasn't his Dad, of course, and Nicky was glad. He couldn't remember his Dad that much, and he's only seen him once or twice. The only things he knew from memory was that he was really angry and really loud and yelled and Mommy and him a lot of the time, and he used to smell like beer, like Uncle Oz did one night back a year ago. But Uncle Oz had been friendly-drunk, and Dad had been mean-drunk. There was a difference. When he was drunk, Dad always hit Mommy over and over and over again and sometimes would hit Nicky. Nicky was too little and thought it was something he did wrong and he didn't do much, since he was little over three, so he just stopped the little he'd been doing. That's why Nicky was quiet all the time. Also, he knew that his Dad had red hair just like him and ice-blue eyes, so that's where he got the looks in the family.

><br>Xander never raised his voice at Mommy or Nicky or Annie or Julie or Josh. At least in mean ways. Sometimes the kids were so loud Xander would \*need\* to shout to be heard, but otherwise then that he was not loud. And he \*never\* hit anybody, except once or twice he would do funny things like spank Mommy's butt and she would laugh and enjoy it or he would be drying Julie's hair with the hairdryer and then occasionally touch it to her butt so that she would jump and laugh and hit Xander playfully on the arm. And Xander never drank, except on New Years when everybody had a teeny bit of champagne, and when Xander went out with his friends he only had one drink or two, and that didn't affect him at all.

><br>Annie didn't look like anyone else in the family, either. Neither did the twins. None of them looked like brother and sister, and Mommy and Xander were always asked about it, mainly if they had adopted all of them or something like that.

><br>Nicky was tall like his mom with red hair and ice-blue eyes, and lotsa freckles like his dad that everybody always said were cute but Nicky thought they were ugly 'cause they were like his dads. When all the other seven-year-olds talked, their voice were squeaky and loud, but Nicky's voice was soft and calm, and Xander used to joke that he wanted Nicky's voice more than his, Nicky like Xander's voice. Nicky like lotsa things about Xander. Nicky would trade voices with Xander anyday.

><br>Julie and Josh looked just like each other and a little like their father and a lot like their mother. They had never known their mother. Their Mommy had died back in England, but they said a prayer to her every night for the angel's to watch over her and they had pictures to look at her. Their mommy was very pretty, but not as pretty as Mommy, at least in Nicky's opinion. No one was pretty than Mommy. Julie and Josh both had brown hair the color of Xander's and heavy eyebrows like him, but they had heart-shaped faces and the most "gorgeous" pair of blue-gray eyes you'd ever seen. When they smiled, and that was a lot, they had the deepest dimple on their chin, and Julie had lots of "attractive" beauty marks. When they smiled, they smiled just like their Dad. Ms. Natalie said they could be child

models, if they had their behavior a little more under control. But Josh's behavior wasn't his fault, cause he has ADD and had to take Ritalin. Julie was normal. They were both short, but then again, they were only five.

><br>Annie was a mix of both the Chase and Harris families, but looked nothing like Mommy and Xander. She was tiny for a three-year-old, and neither of her parents were tiny, but Mommy's mom was tiny so there was a Chase gene. She had long blond hair that laid in wispy bits around her oval face, and that was from Xander's side of the family with his great-grandmother. She had big brown eyes that were the color of Mommy's uncle's eyes and a tiny stub of a nose that was from Xander's side of the family again, from his Dad. Being mute was Annie's special thing. She was even gonna be place in the special class when she started to go to school. There was not a special class at Nicky's school, so that was only the bad part of the thing, 'cause Nicky would miss her there, like he did now.

><br>Now to Xander. Xander was the coolest dad out of anyone Nicky knew, and Nicky knew lotsa dads 'cause he knew lotsa kids. Xander bought Nicky a lot of toys, and at first Nicky had thought that he bought all those toys so that Nicky would like him. Nicky was wrong, in a way. Xander bought Josh and Julie toys, too, but Xander would play with them, too. There was one day when the house was being fixed, and there was noise from upstairs and the whole downstairs was a mess. Xander got out every action figure they had, including some Barbies, and placed them all over the living room. Then Nicky, Josh, Julie, and Xander pretended it was all a war zone, and they played together, pretending the living room was the battle field and that the noises of the workmen upstairs were gunshots and stuff. Then Mommy and Annie came in the room and Annie started stomping on everything and then Josh started to whine and complain, but then Nicky said that she was Godzilla and they were in China and they'd better run for cover! Josh and Julie had grinned and fallen for it and they had watched their half-sister demolish their "battlefield" and Nicky had felt good when Xander had flashed him a thank you smile. Xander was pretty ok.

><br>And Mommy was ok 'cause she was Mommy. Nobody else could be Mommy. Ever. That was it.

><br>Mommy and Xander were off to New York and had dropped off Nicky, Julie, Josh, and Annie at Ms. Natalie's house. Ms. Natalie was upstairs resting for just a half hour and everybody had promised not to do anything bad. Nicky was watching everybody and would tell Ms. Natalie who was being bad. Nobody was, so Nicky had it pretty good. He was just...being there.

><br>And then the loud, raucous cries from the living room stopped. Nicky at first thought they were playing Graveyard or something, but there were no sounds of shuffling or moving and they always did that even thought it was against the rules 'cause they never heard each other and their eyes were closed. The game would end either by somebody waking them up 'cause they would've gone into la-la land, or someone bumping into each other. But it was too soon for them to have fallen asleep.

><br>Nicky put his cookie down, or what remained of his cookie, and looked over at Annie. She looked back at him with those brown eyes. She had made little progress on her cookie. Nicky thought about leaving her here while he checked on the twins, but he thought that Annie might fall out of her chair or something. He worried about her a lot. So Nicky crawled out of his chair and then helped Annie down from hers and they walked into the dining room hand-in-hand.

><br>The twins were nowhere in sight. Nicky's grip on Annie's hand

tightened as he looked all around the room. Yup, nowhere. Oh oh, he'd better wake Ms. Natalie up and tell her the twins were gone...or hiding.

><br>"BOO!"

><br>Nicky jumped in the air and Annie let out a shriek as the voices came out of nowhere. Nicky spun around and saw Josh and Julie standing side-by-side, silly identical grins on their faces. They were giggling quietly. Nicky didn't get upset because he used to sneak up on people like that. All he did was make sure Annie wasn't too spooked and patted his right pocket, where he had an extra bottle of Josh's pills in case of an emergency. He sighed and said, "You got us."

><br>"We know," they said in twin voices. Then their faces clouded over, and their eyes widened.

><br>"What is it?" Nicky asked. The twins were very quiet, not speaking a word. Nicky saw they were staring at something over his shoulder, and as he turned to see what was so captivating, the sinking feeling in his stomach told his young self that whatever it was, it couldn't be good.

><br>His fears were confirmed, and none of the four children had any time to scream before the big blue vortex-thingy surround them with a blue-gray light the color of the twin's eyes and everything around them disappeared.

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><br>The four figures hovered over the pool of blood, two dressed in typical vampire leather and the other two dressed only in heavy black cowls. The two figures in cowls leaned over into the blood, whispering ancient chants and occasionally touching the blood, makings shimmering ripples all across the surface. To the figures in leather, they were just ripples. To the figures in cowls, they were the movements of time.

><br>"Is everything in bloody place already?" asked Fil2. "My foot's falling asleep here." He shifted his weight to further impress his point upon his comrades.

><br>"Quiet, patience," whispered Fic2, although she barely heard him. She was gazing that the blood ripples with a sort of quiet awe, moving and speaking only when Fic1 told her to. "Ssh, dove, all is well."

><br>"These things take time, you know," said Fic1, a bit crossly. There was something evident in her voice, something that said "I'm surrounded by morons". "Time is a very difficult dimension to work with, especially under these conditions. There is still \*light\* in this room."

><br>"There's no bloody light in this room," said Fil2, more than slightly pissed. "If there was bloody light in here then I'd be up in flames."

><br>"There is light," grated Fic1. Her finger dove into the pool of blood and caused a strong ripple, and the faint sound of voices that greeted her ears was comforting. "I can feel it." Fic1 allowed herself a smile. "The children have come through."

><br>"Great. Wonderful. And where do we find them?" asked Fil2.

><br>"How in the hell-on-earth should I know?" spat back Fic1. She gave another sharp dip in the blood, and then motioned for Fic2 to make soft little ripples all around the area in which she had jabbed.

><br>"Now, now," chided Fil1, who had been silent for a good ten minutes. "Let's not upset the gorgeous demon-witch who has been very

grateful in lending us her services."

><br>Fic1 grinned, and then turned around to face Fill, her fingers still at work in the pool. "Ah, Angelus," she said sultrily, "you always were the flirt."

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## 6. Default Chapter Title

F-Xander was pacing in front of the van, hands shoved tightly in his pockets, His jaw was set and his teeth clenched so tightly that his jaw line was beginning to quiver. His eyes had narrowed into slits, and he was trying as hard as he could not to explode into the violent version of his father that he always turned into in front of Buffy. He was trying really, really hard. And God, was he the hypocrite. Telling F-Faith and F-Willow to be careful, to remember that they could go psycho in the past and reveal the future...he'd read books on this stuff one day in the library...he saw the entire 'Back to the Future' trilogy over and over again...but now at the sight of Buffy and her veiled comments just made him want to throw his words to the wind. And maybe Buffy with them.

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>"Xander?" It was F-Cordelia. F-Xander noted how she had kept her calm. She felt no anger towards Buffy, not even after what she had done to her. F-Xander thought that was a great maturity on her part. Too bad that meant him channeling the anger for the both of him. F-Oz once commented that F-Xander was in his fourth childhood, and F-Xander often thought it true. <br>

>F-Xander turned around and F-Cordelia grabbed him in hug. He unsheathed his hands and hugged her back tightly. He looked up from where he had been looking at how the moonlight reflected off her chocolate-colored hair and noticed F-Willow and F-Oz hurrying at a fast-enough past towards the van. Behind them, he could see F-Buffy in the distance. He did not want to deal with her now. And there, just about the rising crest of the tiny hill that marked the driveway of the dilapidated mansion was the younger generation. F-Xander wondered how much of a fool he had made of himself in front of everyone else. <br>

>"Xander, remember your own words," F-Cordelia was mumbling into his shoulder. He placed his hands on her shoulders and she backed away. "I mean, ya gotta control your anger and all that junk. I mean, this is like, time. Major stuff that we don't wanna mess with. And the past is im, uh, im..." <br>

>"...impressionable?" F-Xander finished for her, and F-Cordelia nodded her head. "Yeah, I agree. But that's like asking Buffy to grow a backbone. It just can't be done." <br>

>"Okay, we're getting nasty here again," F-Cordelia warned, and on a silly impulse, F-Xander kissed the center of her forehead. She smiled. "That was nice. What for?" <br>

>"'Cause I love you," F-Xander explained. "And by some strange feat of the cosmos, you're actually being my reasonable side...in a way." <br>

>"Yup, the cosmos are way scary," F-Cordelia agreed, and she kissed him on the nose. <br>

>F-Willow and F-Oz had caught up with them and they both looked a little more than worried. F-Oz's eyes were flicking nervously from side to side, and all the hair on his head was mondo spiky. His lips were drawn in a thin line, and he had a very canine appearance all about it. Sometimes it could be extremely creepy, the fact that F-Oz could control his humanwerewolf self at such an experienced level.

><br>"What's the matter with Fido?" F-Xander asked, jerking his head towards F-Oz. F-Oz, in a calm state, would have looked at F-Xander, shaken his head, and they would smile at each other and exchanged some more easy banter. But this time F-Oz just rested his eyes momentarily on F-Xander, and he noticed that his eyes were no longer and lukewarm green but a faint yellow tinge, like he had hepatitis.

><br>"Christ, Oz, what's wrong?" F-Cordelia asked, spooked.

><br>F-Oz turned sharply to his left. "I dunno..." he trailed off. Then he looked at F-Willow. She turned to where he was staring and peered into the dark thicket of bushes. She tilted her head as thought she were listening to something far, far away. She had goosebumps on her arms. "Do you hear that?" he whispered to her softly.

><br>"Yeah...but there's so much of it. I just can't place it...either it's awfully big or..." F-Willow trailed off and looked back at F-Oz, who made a contemplative little grunted and changed so his eyes were back to their mellow green. "We gotta get out of here soon. There's something about this place, it just seems \*wrong\*, you know..."

><br>"Evil wrong or...other wrong?" F-Willow and F-Oz turned around to see F-Buffy standing there, a sort of sheepish and apologetic grimace on her face. "Sorry, that was a stupid question, Hellmouth and all." She tugged on her T-shirt, and long strands of dirty blond hair slinked out from over her shoulder and fell across her front, hiding the drawing of a great, sprawling leaf on the right of the words pressed on to her shirt. "But we ought to get of here, definitely."

><br>"Definitely," F-Oz echoed hollowly, and then his head snapped to attention. F-Willow cast him a worried look, and F-Oz shrugged. "Dammit, I can't place where this feeling is coming from. Maybe it's just 'cause I'm sensing my younger self and all, and the werewolf in me is going crazy trying to figure out the two senses."

><br>F-Xander was going to point out that he had not been effected in the van, in extremely close quarters with Oz, when the Scooby Gang caught up on them. "Hey, you could wait for us!" accused Xander in a good-natured, very nervous voice. You could tell they had run up here, because they had the faint twinge of the scent of sweat that you did not need preternatural scent to detect. F-Xander noticed how cute Willow looked when the edges of her hair were just tinted with sweat. Then he creased his eyebrows in frustration at old feelings that hadn't haunted him since that night in the factory, when he'd lost both of his best girls.

><br>F-Xander's mind was drifting off, and barely listening to the conversation at hand. Everyone was politely arguing about the fact that there was no room in the van for the lot of them. F-Xander didn't touch back down to earth until he heard F-Buffy say "... maybe we could tie Xander to the back fender and drag his body along for the ride."

><br>F-Xander glared at her, and he could feel F-Cordelia's grip tighten on his arm. "If I throw a stick at you, will you leave?" F-Xander asked, receiving an icy glare from the Slayer. F-Xander just shrugged and offered a casual smirk.

><br>"Okay, enough bickering," Buffy cut in, stepping in between the distance that separated F-Xander from F-Buffy. "We need to--"

><br>"Oh-oh," F-Oz said suddenly, standing straight up, Now everybody

turned to look at him, and F-Oz barely had time to swallow. "Duck," he said in a firm voice.

><br>They did just that as the twelve vampires fell from the absolutely nowhere out of the sky and onto their designated target.

><br>So caught unawares, everyone fell to the group except Buffy, who was quickly back on her feet and pounding the vampire into itty bitty vamp pieces because-curses!-she'd left her stake in the mansion. Dammit, she was becoming forgetful, and that was not a virtue in the slaying game. She noted this as the vampire suddenly got back up again, and she kicked him in the face and sent him back a few steps.

><br>Next to her, F-Buffy was having a little more trouble. It had been awhile before she was in actual hand-to-hand combat with an experienced vamp. Usually stupid ones came calling on her, and when she had her slaying tools already. No, this one was strong, almost as strong as Buffy's was, and F-Buffy was doing her best to shake the stars from her eyes as the vampire forcefully pushed her behind the van with his berating fists.

><br>F-Xander had been pounced by a rather puny-like vamp, and F-Xander quickly knocked out the vampire. As it was shaking itself away, he managed to stand protectively in front of F-Cordelia, who had been backed up against the van. The two vampires circled them, their eyes revealing the bloodlust. They looked like they hadn't eaten in days, and F-Cordelia dug her fingernails into F-Xander's back in fear.

><br>Three vampires all fell around Xander, Willow, and Oz, and they were pushed into the center, Oz and Xander pushing the little lady in between them. The vampire seemed content just circling them, a never-ending game of cat and mouse, and Xander and Oz weren't about to press their luck by picking a fight.

><br>F-Oz was knocked down by what looked to be a dead wrestling champ and hell, who knew if it were true? The vampire was big, brawny, and strong. He picked the wrong werewolf to mess with, though. F-Oz wasn't the best fighter out of all of them, but he was ok and he knew when to give in to his other half's animal instincts. With an suppressed roar of outrage, and quickly raked out at the vampire, rolled him over on to his back, and while keeping the vamp at bay he looked around frantically for anything that might be a stake.

><br>F-Willow wasn't so lucky. With her it was like David vs. Goliath, but unfortunately, she didn't have a slingshot or a stake. As the vampire grabbed her by the arms, she kicked at his shins and beat at his chest with her fists, only getting her hands and feet aching because it was like kicking and beating rock. The vampire growled happily and spun her around, grabbing a good hold around her chest and putting one strong hand over her mouth. She tried to struggle, but he just shoved her around and she felt her left arm dislocate. She cried out in pain but it was muffled by the hand. She started to cry and whimper as he dragged her behind the van and made to shove her in it by means of the driver's side door.

><br>Back to Buffy. She had looked down at the floor and realized it was littered with twigs, some of reasonable stake strength. She bent over quickly to grab one, and was kicked to the floor by her vampire assailant. She quickly rolled and jumped back up, only to have the vampire in her face. Something-she didn't know what-made her stop from staking him at that very instant.

><br>"I have a message for you," the vampire leered, and for a moment Buffy realized that this vampire looked her age, and if he was a normal kid, she just might have a crush on him. "Someone send you



their love, and..."

><br>"What?" Buffy said sharply, but her voice quavered just a bit. Love? Perhaps...Spike? He was her only enemy who that string of words could be attached to. Of course, there was also Angel's evil half, but he was long gone.

><br>"Soon it'll all be over," said the vampire, grinning. Then, without a word, he fell towards Buffy and threw her to the ground with his weight, falling right on her makeshift stake and dissolving to dust before she connected with terra firma.

><br>As Buffy's attacker was dusted in vampire Hell, the vampires around Xander, Oz, and Willow turned on their heels and fled. F-Xander's vampire did the same, and Buffy's attacker took the moment to spit by her feet before he took off with the rest of them. She stopped shaking and managed to gather her thoughts with just enough time to run back to where everyone else was, not even noticing Willow's kicking legs and the vampire shoved her into the back of the van. F-Oz had seen the twig-slaying technique and finished off his vampire just in time, and then rolled on to his back, chest heaving.

><br>"Gotta love that Hellmouth," Xander commented.

><br>F-Oz silently agreed and climbed to his feet, shaking himself off. He quickly turned around and checked if he hadn't completely reverted into Mad Dog, as F-Xander liked to call it. He hadn't. Good. And then...he smelled it.

><br>Fear. Fear...and his Willow.

><br>"Willow?" F-Oz asked, and then looked around. No one else saw her. Suddenly, Oz bolted around to the other side of the van as the engine revved up.

><br>As everyone else stood on the other side, they were startled as F-Willow's back suddenly slammed into the passenger-side window, clouding all view. There was the vampire's roar, then the roar of another animal, and then a slashing sound and the van rocked for one terrible moment. Then there was a strangled gasp that came from F-Willow, and then the engine started to really turn on. F-Willow's back suddenly disappeared from the window, and the vampire's greasy, dirty face appeared instead. He smiled, revealing an empty black hole, and gave a little wave as the van roared off. Lying on the sidewalk in the wake of the van were F-Oz and F-Willow, F-Oz looking a bit dazed and F-Willow crying and holding her left arm, which was limp at her side.

><br>F-Oz stood up and then quickly turned over to F-Willow as everyone came cautiously up behind him. He helped her up and then looked at her arm, which hung off its own accord by her side. "It's dislocated," Buffy said simply, recognizing it because it had happened many a time to her. F-Oz turned to her and shot her such a look full of venom that's he quickly clamped her mouth shut. Oz and Willow were looking at the couple with a mixed amount of fear and curiosity.

><br>"Here," F-Oz said, reaching out to steady her. The tears had stopped, but a few recent ones made the lonely trek down her pale cheek, and F-Oz wished he could do anything and everything to make her tears disappear. He hated when she hurt and he couldn't make what was hurting her go away. He experienced that a lot.

><br>"What're you going to do?" F-Willow asked with wide eyes and she noticed F-Oz reaching for her arm. She got it. "Is it going to hurt?" she asked in a small voice.

><br>"If I lied and said no, would that make you feel any better?" F-Oz asked.

><br>"No, but, uh, yeah, it'll make me feel better."

><br>"Ok, it's not going to hurt, then." F-Oz then squinted as though

he regretted what he was going to do, and then quickly followed the careful instructions his ex-girlfriend, Robyn, a pre-med, had taught him.

><br>"Ow!" F-Willow exclaimed, reaching for her arm, which was once again attached to its socket. She rubbed it gently, and then looked at F-Oz, who's expression was of guilty relief. She pulled him into a hug and tried her best not to cry into his shoulder, but just murmured that it didn't hurt that much at all, that she was just an exaggerator.

><br>"I feel better now," F-Oz whispered back. F-Willow smiled; they both knew she was lying. She sent him soothing energy, and he received it and sent her a bit of his own.

><br>There was sound of someone clearing his throat. The both of them turned their faces up to look at the gang.

><br>"Um...", Oz started, not quite sure what to say. "I hate to interrupt the moment, but my van...the wheels are gone. How 're we going to get back to the library."

><br>Everyone looked at where the van had driven off, each silently cursing the gods in their own way.

><br>"I hate Sunnydale," F-Cordelia said through clenched teeth.

><br>"You said it," F-Xander agreed.

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><br>"Nicky, where are we?"

><br>Julie's voice was small and hallow as it echoed in the tight hallway they had been dumped in after sliding out of the blue-light-thingy. Her quiet words of fear ricocheted off the decaying walls covered in peeling, burnt wallpaper, light spots where pictures had once hung. The place smelled of dust and decay. It smelled icky.

><br>"I dunno," Nicky said in a voice as quiet as Julie's had been. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Josh put a comforting arm around Julie's shoulder. She didn't move away. Annie had surgically attached herself to his leg, and it was beginning to go numb.

><br>"How do we figure where we are?" Josh asked. He wasn't as scared as the girls were, and he traded looks with Nicky. Nicky shrugged. "We're staying here till somebody comes?" Josh suggested.

><br>"I dunno," Nicky said again. I rarely ever said those words, and twice was quite out of the norm. That set Josh on edge, and they looked around.

><br>It wasn't really a hallway, more like a corridor, because it was very narrow. The ground below their feet was an old and splintered wood, yellow with age and not at all like the wooden floor of the Harris house. All of them were barefoot, and the first thing that flashed through Nicky's mind was that they were going to get splinters. And then they were going to get the splinters taken \*out\*. They'd better walk extra careful.

><br>Annie made some sounds that sounded like a donkey trying to speak while being strangled. Nicky patted her on the shoulder.

"Everything's ok," he promised. "We're gonna get right back to Ms. Natalie's. We just gotta..."

><br>He trailed off at the sudden soft sound of pitter-pattering slippers. The sounds were far away, but they were quickly coming nearer. Nicky and Josh shoved the girls behind their back and Nicky tried to shove Josh back to, but Josh would have none of it and just glared at him, throwing his arm away. Nicky did \*not\* want to start an argument with him, because Josh could be awfully loud, and if this thing that was walking towards them was trouble, then Josh would get

them into it.

><br>Then, in front of them, out of the shadows of the deeper part of the corridor, a figure began to emerge. A tall figure, and already you could see the contrast between the shadows and her pale white skin. She wore a long, shimmering gown-thingy, but it didn't shimmer in the corridor because there was no light. As she walked towards them, Nicky and Josh stepped up their nerve.

><br>The figure stopped before them, just a few paces away.

><br>"Hello?" Elisabeth Sarah Daly asked in a small, soft voice. Nicky and Josh did not answer, and she clasped her hands in front of her and began to nervously wring them. "A-are you lost t-too?"

><br>Nicky looked the petite brown-haired, green-eyed girl up and down. "Are you lost?" Nicky asked.

><br>"Yes."

><br>"We could take her," Josh said confidently into his ear. Nicky nodded. Guess they'd have to trust this girl, find out where she came from, if she knew a way out and was trying to get there.

><br>"What's your name?" Nicky asked casually.

><br>"Pardon?" inquired the girl, leaning closer to him. She hadn't heard what Nicky was saying, so Josh screamed it out for her.

><br>"What's your name?!" he asked her, and then flinched as the sound echoed down the corridor. It was loud, louder than Julie's voice had been. Everyone glared at him, everyone but es, that it.

><br>"It's Elisabeth Sarah," she whispered, "but call me Es. It's shorter, and it's what my parents call me."

><br>"Daddy, Cordy..." Julie whimpered. She was so off-center that she didn't even smack Josh for announcing their presence. "Nicky, can we please go home?" Nicky gave her a look that said "I'm workin' on it" and then looked down at Annie. Her bottom lip was trembling.

><br>"Well, ok, Es," Nicky said calmly, "we have got to find a way out of here and back home. Where did you come from."

><br>"My house, 'f course," Es told him. She stopped wringing her hands. "I was, you know, sleeping, and then I'm here, and then I heard people talking, so...I came to see. And found you guys."

><br>"Oh," Nicky said, and stopped to think. He looked down at Annie, who still looked like she was about to cry. "Um, well, where we you...before you came over here."

><br>"O'er there." She pointed down the corridor. "Are we...gonna go there?"

><br>"Why not?" Nicky shrugged. Es nodded, and they followed her as she led them to where she had been dumped off.

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><br>Julie was so glad she had a twin, someone who was there for her. As Josh's arm settled comfortably around her shoulder, she felt protected. But she didn't know how much Josh could protect her from that...blue thingy.

><br>One second they were reveling in the joy of Nicky actually being spooked and then there was this big, whirling bunch of blue lights that turned into this big gaping mouth-thing that stood behind Nicky and Annie. And they were totally oblivious. The hole looked like something out of Star Trek, and Julie and Josh had been stunned.

Then, when Nicky and Annie turned around, and mouth of light washed over them and then it wasn't a mouth, it was a hole, and then there was a tunnel, and they were sliding and sliding and sliding...and then here.

><br>Just knowing Josh was in this mess with her made her feel a little bit comfortable. Knowing Nicky was in this mess made her very, very secure. Nicky would take care of stuff. Gosh, he was seven. He was, like, almost a grown-up.

><br>"You know," Julie said as they walked down the hall, "this place kinda 'minds me of a cave."

><br>"Yeah, me too," Josh agreed. Nicky nodded his head, and Annie followed in course. Es didn't do anything, because she had never been in a cave before. She had just seen one from the outside when her Mommy brought her to a shoot in Arizona.

><br>"Katie's been in a cave before," Julie continued.

><br>"Katie? Who's Katie?" Josh asked suspiciously, looking over at his sister.

><br>"My bestest friend," Julie said matter-of-factly, bracing herself for what Josh was gonna do. 'Cause she \*knew\* what he was gonna do.

><br>"Your \*bestest friend\*?!" Josh exploded, whipping his arm off of Julie's shoulder. "Katie can't be your best friend," he said frantically. "\*I'm\* your bestest friend."

><br>"Katie's my bestest friend too," Julie said stubbornly, tilting her head up and crossing her arms. She wrinkled her nose in distaste. She had seen Cordy do this when she knew she was right and wanted everyone else to know it to, and it worked. For Cordy, anyway.

><br>"No, \*I'm\* your bestest friend, and \*nobody\* else can be your bestest friend 'cause... 'cause... 'cause \*I said so\*!"

><br>"I don't need to lis'en to you! You're not the boss of me!"

><br>"Ju-li-a!"

><br>"Jo-shu-a!"

><br>That was their little code to be quiet. When they tired of the argument, they would end it by calling out each other's names. Usually it didn't take them long to end the argument, and they always ended peacefully, so that's why Daddy and Cordy let them argue until their anger dissipated.

><br>Now they both crossed their arms and stared angrily at each other. Right about now, Nicky had thrown being quiet to the wind. He looked over at Es and explained, "They do this a lot."

><br>"Oh," Es said. "Well, I haven't any brothers or sister, so I don't know too much about arguing and stuff." Her face, which he noticed was dirt-streaked, brightened. "I do have a dog, though." Nicky looked interested, so Es continued. "His name is Giles, and he's a Goldy Retriever, and he has shaggy blond hair and brown eyes and he can't fetch but that's ok 'cause we hardly ever play. Do you have a pet dog, too?"

><br>Nicky shook his head. "Nope, but my Mommy has a cat. She's really tiny, like a kitten, but not. She's kinda solitaire, so we don't get to play with her a lot." He stopped to think. "I've heard that name before," he said slowly. "Xander...knows your dog, I guess."

><br>"Xander?" Es asked. Nicky nodded. "My Mommy knows a Xander. She doesn't like him." Es wrinkled her nose in distaste, in a decidedly Buffy fashion.

><br>"Well, then it can't be my step-dad," Nicky quipped. "Everybody likes my step-dad. And he likes everybody, too."

><br>"Oh," Es said. Then she looked up ahead. "We're here."

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><br>"Here" was very much "nowhere." It looked just like the rest of the hall. Nothing different.

><br>"So we walked down here for nothing?" Josh asked bluntly. Nicky shrugged. "That was a waste," Josh grumbled, and slammed back into the wall brooding over being stuck here and dealing with Julie's Katie. As he connected with the wall, there was a hallow thumping sound.

><br>Instantly, a memory of their last trip-to-somewhere echoed through Nicky's mind. Xander had taken the whole fam to Ruby Falls, a place in a state that Nicky thought started with a k-at least, he thought so. He wasn't too sure, 'cause he'd slept through the whole plane ride when Xander was explaining the place to Mommy and Julie and Josh and Annie and didn't think to ask later. But anyway, Ruby Falls was a waterfall-a really beautiful waterfall-that was underground in a whole bunch of caves. The sight was really amazing, and afterwards Nicky had been dazed the whole trip to the surface. Xander had noticed and at first thought that Nicky was sick. Nicky said no, he just thought the whole experience was really cool. Xander'd nodded, and asked if he wanted to see something else cool. Nicky had said sure.

><br>So, as they were walking up and Mommy was making sure nobody feel and scrapped their knee or broke anything, Xander told Nicky to start tapping alongside the cave walls. Nicky did just that, and was rewarded by thick thudding sounds. Just as his hand was beginning to hurt, there was a thunking sound instead of a thudding sound. Xander explained that while there was a bunch of cave-rock behind all the rock he'd been thudding on, there was only a thin piece here. Meaning that there was nothing behind it. Nicky had said cool, and then said his hand ached a bit. Xander apologized and bought everybody ice creams at the next food place.

><br>So, hallow...maybe a hidden door? 'Like in the books Mrs. O'Brien reads to us' his mind said excitedly, thinking of his first-grade teacher. Nicky nodded to himself, and Julie noticed. "What?" she asked. Annie tugged on his hand in her form of asking him the same thing.

><br>"Nothing, just..." Nicky let go of Annie's hand and went over to where Josh was slouching. "Get up." Josh was about to object, but Nicky gave him a Look and Josh got up and backed away to where Annie now stood, minus her big brother's hand.

><br>"What're you gonna do?" Julie asked, as Nicky looked all around the place where Josh had banged against and found it hallow. The wallpaper was peeling and in a tremendous need of repair. It smelled old 'n' musky 'n' icky. "Nicky, pay at\*ten\*tion to me," Julie complained, stamping her foot.

><br>Nicky complete ignored her, but instead let out a little squeak of delight. He carefully ripped back a piece of wallpaper to reveal the line of a doorjamb. He dug his fingers into that line, and after several failed attempts, managed to get a good grip and tugged hard, pulling back the door and ripping the rest of the wallpaper. Voila, a secret hallway.

><br>"Wow," Es said, admiration evident in her voice.

"You're...you're just like Indiana Jones."

><br>"She's right, Nicky," Julie said sincerely. Josh rolled his eyes. Julie poked him in the ribs, and Josh poked her right back. Then they just glared at each other.

><br>"Well..." Nicky trailed off. He couldn't see much more than a

foot into the hallway, which was wide enough to fit three of them side-by-side and tall enough so that Nicky and Es could stand and there'd still be some room above their heads. "Are we gonna go in?"

><br>Everyone just stared blankly at him. Nicky sighed.

><br>"Ok...me and Es go in first. Then Annie. Then Julie and Josh. Ok? Everyone...look for each other and don't get lost. Ok?"

><br>Everyone shook their heads. Then Es decided to say something.

><br>"You know what, everyone?" They turned to look at her. "All of this is very weird."

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><br>"Weird. This is weird. This is very, very...strange."

><br>For come unknown reason, Jonah just could not sleep tonight. Usually he was like a rock, or a log, or whatever the hell people used as a simile for totally konking out. But not tonight, for some reason. Tonight he kept waking up for brief moments in a state of half-awareness, and then fall right back to sleep. The only thing he noticed during these brief periods of consciousness was that outside of the house, there was one hell of a rainstorm.

><br>Now he had once again woken up, very hungry, in fact. As he tried to bring complete awareness to his clouded mind, he felt Buffy's warm body slide next his. Screw awareness. He was filled with warmth and an intense desire he still felt for her all these years. Too bad that he was so tired he felt like lead. He tried to muster up some strength to roll over and give her a kiss on the cheek, tell her he loved her, but he couldn't. he just stared at the alarm clock and hoped he had set it for the right time. There would be shooting today.

><br>Besides, he could already hear the deep, even breaths that signaled Buffy was fast asleep. Funny. She had never fallen asleep that fast before. She's fallen asleep almost as fast as he and Es. Maybe it was rubbing off on her, after seven or so years.

><br>Jonah mustered a smile and then let himself relax. He felt his now-tensed muscles melt into puddles. He loved to sleep, and as a writer/director, not to count being a stunt coordinator for several of his action movies, he barely got any shut-eye. He drifted off...

><br>...and came back again as suddenly, the warmth of Buffy's body was gone. Jonah rolled his head over and saw she wasn't there. Hmm. Jonah rolled his head on over to the other side, where there was a digital alarm clock. Hell, it was still the same exact minute when he had felt Buffy next to him! He looked back. There was the slightest indent in the mattress, the scent of the shampoo in her hair, and the lipstick on the pillow that showed that she indeed had been here. He hadn't just dreamed it. Why dream it when you can have the real thing?

><br>Whatever. Jonah was awake now, and his stomach was rumbling, faintly. It was embarrassing. With a sigh, Jonah rolled out of bed and sat on the edge, collecting himself and trying to push the uneasiness out of his mind. He had dreamed it, he had to have dreamt it. Buffy couldn't just disappear into thin air. It wasn't possible. And that was that.

><br>Jonah stood up, all those annoying muscles and bones making

popping and creaking sounds as he opened the door to the master bedroom and started down the hall. He looked groggily around him as he reached the stair case. Yawning, he descended the steps, ruffling his hair in an attempt to wake up.

><br>He stopped in the living room before he entered the kitchen. There was a half-empty mug of brown liquid sitting on the table, and the TV Guide and remote were in complete disarray, not in their usual neat spot. The couch, also, was full of creases. "Buffy slept down here," Jonah noted. "For a moment. Hmm. Hungry. I...am...hungry." Alright, awake enough. Jonah stumbled into the kitchen, grabbed a Nutri-Grain bar from one of the cupboards, wolfed it down, and then looked at the microwave's clock.

><br>"Christ, Butch'll already be out there," Jonah mumbled. "Maybe...well, I'm awake already. Should go over there. Butch'll need help...the old oaf." Jonah smiled. That was the complete opposite of what Butch was: that's why he'd hired him.

><br>Still, he'd ought to get over there. No matter how good he was, Butch was still new to this game. Butch was his protégé, and Jonah should drag his ass over to the studio lot and act as his mentor.

><br>"Man, your work rocks," Butch had told them when they had first met at a fundraiser to collect money for the poor in Honduras. "I just love it all. I totally want to follow in your footsteps."

><br>"Well, don't follow too closely," Jonah had joked. "I've run into a lot of walls on the way." That had started off the friendship.

><br>Jonah closed the cupboard, turned off the kitchen light, and made his way through the living room and up the stairs. He headed towards the master bedroom, but then stopped and turned on his heel. Buffy had just done the wash, and that meant that the clothes he wanted to wear were in the hall closet. Damn, he'd better move 'em so he wouldn't have to pace up and down the hallway. Too big a house (mansion? He never knew what to call it?) to be doing that.

><br>He hummed to himself as he opened the closet door and started to look for his clothes. It was a song from the soundtrack of his latest released movie, the one that had played during the credits. A band had sung it...Hellmouth, he thought. Yes, Hellmouth: Buffy had all of their CDs, and considering there were about five, that was a lot. Although the song they were using was off their first album, Jonah wanted a new version of it so Hellmouth was going to gather in the studio recording room and sing the new version of "Silent Cries." Jonah had asked if Buffy wanted to come along, but for some strange reason, she had said no. Jonah had pressed for a moment or two, but after a blunt rebuttal he just gave up and went without her.

><br>He had, though, caught her listening to that CD later, fingering the case and humming to herself. She had been all alone in the living room, except for Giles snuggled up to her feet. The setting looked awfully endearing, so Jonah had left them alone and waited until Buffy came upstairs. They'd watched a movie or two, and then kissed each other goodnight. Jonah could not help but notice that something was wrong, but he had not pressed because she had not brought it up, and the mood had dissipated by the next day.

><br>Now, Jonah found himself worrying about Buffy's whereabouts again. He looked down the right of the hall, where Es' bedroom was. The door was slightly open, and light spilled into the hallway. Maybe Es was having trouble sleeping, and Buffy had gone there? He would have to check. Grabbing the clothes from the closet, he quickly

pulled them on. Comfortable clothes. Old jeans, and one of those corny shirts that had the name of his dad's old alma mater across the front, the letter now since faded into a blurry oblivion.

><br>Jonah reached up to the top of the closet where he had thrown his watch last night along with the bath towel, and did not feel like retrieving it. His hand felt for it, but it only bumped into the soft fabric of the bath towels. "Damn, it's in the bedroom," he spoke softly, just to hear the sound of his voice. The only sound was of the storm, and it was a bit eerie. Jonah cleared his throat and looked down at his bare feet as he closed the closet door. Then, with a tired sigh, he turned to go to the bedroom.

><br>And fell into a black hole.

><br>Well, it was more like a \*blue\* hole, really, because as he fell through the pudding-like gloop, it flashes of light that swirled thickly around him were the color of the sky on a clear day. Jonah only noticed, though, that he was falling, falling in blue, and it felt like he had been dumped in a vat of pudding.

><br>And then he was staring up at the night sky, dotted with glistening little lights of stars. Through his ratty old shirt, he felt the hard pebbles of gravel. Through his limited line of vision, he saw the tops of houses. Houses, houses...where the hell was he?

><br>Then he heard the footsteps behind him, and quickly scrambled to his feet. He was in a crouching position when the young woman's body suddenly soared over his head and met with a thud on the concrete. Her body spun out of control and then came to halt in a few feet in front of him, splayed out in unnatural directions. The young woman's back arched up like a cat, but then fell back down in defeat. Jonah looked at the girl for one stunned moment, and then shook his head and stood up and around to see where the woman had come from.

><br>And looked right into the face-the very deformed face-of a very angry...creature.

><br>"Wrong place, right time," the creature growled, grinning and showing a mouth full of long, sharp teeth, and the lunged for him.

><br>Jonah was no chicken-shit. This guy was going to get what he gave. As the creature lunged forward, Jonah hit him square in the stomach-it was like hitting rock, but the creature did bend over for a moment in pain. Jonah took that moment to step on the creature's foot and then hit it on the back of it's next with his hand karate-style, making the creature slump towards the ground.

><br>Not to test his luck any further, Jonah gave the creature one last look and then hurried over to where the young woman was. He went over to her other side and pushed the hair away from her face. It was a young woman, yes, who had a nasty cut on her forehead that seemed not to be bleeding that much. "A-are you ok?" he asked, glancing up at the creature. He was getting back up on his feet.

><br>"Christ," the woman groaned, and then settled her eyes on him. She pushed something towards him with her foot. "Stake. Stake through the heart."

><br>Jonah's eyes widened. "What?" He looked back at the creature. It was swaying unsteadily on its feet. "We have to get out of here," he told the woman frantically, who rolled her eyes.

><br>"Dammit! Men are so incompetent!" the woman exclaimed, and with some miracle, got back to her feet just as the creature was headed towards them. Jonah watched as she whirled around and blocked the



creature's left hook expertly. \*Nice\* said the director in him. But this wasn't some movie that he was directing. This was real life.

><br>Right? He didn't know anymore.

><br>He instantly believed he was in some kind of fantasy world when the girl took the stake she had insisted he hold and shoved it into the creature's heart. The creature gave a shoke of surprise, reached for his heart, and then turned into dust.

><br>If Jonah were a lesser man, he would have fainted from shock right then and there.

><br>The creature dusted, the woman turned towards him. She raised her eyebrows and blew back the air that was hanging in her face.

"Fun, huh?" she asked him, and then breezed right by and continued down the road. "Thanks!" she called over her shoulder.

><br>Jonah stood there for a moment, all his confusing emotions bottling up into him until it exploded. "Hey!" he said, turning around to see Faith was just going off. "Come back here! What do you mean..." he shook, trying to gather his thoughts, "thanks! What was that! Who are \*you\*?"

><br>The woman sighed, rolled her eyes up to sky, and turned around haughtily. She put on hand on her hips and waved the hand with the stake around. "My name is Faith, the Vampire Slayer. I slay vampires. What just attacked both you and me was a vampire. And I slayed him. My work here is done." Faith turned around then started off again, her heels making clicking sounds on the gravel.

><br>"No, wait!" Jonah cried, hurrying up behind her. Faith sighed lout enough to here and stopped until he came up behind her. She crossed her arms and waited for him to explain himself, looking off into another direction. "What do you mean, \*vampires\*. A-and, what the hell am I even doing here?" He have a nervous chuckle and spread his arms, gesturing around him. "What is \*here\*?"

><br>Faith wasn't moved. She looked at him and then let her hands fall to her sides. "Look, whoever you are," she started, but Jonah interrupted.

><br>"Jonah. My name's Jonah."

><br>"That's nice, Jonah. Mind letting me finish?" Jonah nodded.

"Alright, you are in Sunnydale. Vampires are real. An-" she cut herself off, peering closer at him. "Okay, now I have questions for you. Where the hell did \*you\* come from. You just appeared outta nowhere."

><br>"I know," Jonah said. "I'm hoping to find out why."

><br>Faith raised an eyebrow. "You have experience with the supernatural, Jonah?" He shook his head no. "Well, than, we'd better get somewhere where you'd be educated." She spun on her heel and started down the other direction of the road. Jonah hurried to catch up with her.

><br>"Where are we going?" he asked.

><br>"Library," Faith said matter-of-factly.

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## 7. Default Chapter Title

"Oh, this can't be good," Willow whimpered.

><br>They couldn't even hear the van anymore, it was so far off. Probably out of Sunnydale by now, given the amount of time the Gang had just stood there, gaping wide-mouthed at the retreating wheels. They were completely screwed over.

><br>"My van..." Oz said, his voice wistful and aching. He loved that van. He loved it like it was his kid. And now, gone, taken away by vampires. "Damn."

><br>"So how are we going to get back?" F-Buffy asked, straightening her mussed T-shirt. Now that she was in front of others besides Jonah and Es, she noticed that her sleeping shirt was way too short. "We're not going to...walk, are we?"

><br>"Horrors," F-Xander said sarcastically, putting a hand over his heart and staring at her like she was some alien from another planet.

><br>F-Buffy glared at him. "You know, I'm really getting tired of you!"

><br>"Hey!" Buffy interjected, getting between them. She threw her hands out between the two. "Can you guys just go \*one moment\* without getting at each other's throats?"

><br>"No," both answered promptly.

><br>"You all are a bunch of five-year-olds," F-Willow said with a trace of contempt from the sidelines. Then she turned to F-Buffy. "Really, what's with you and walking?"

><br>"It's walking," F-Buffy insisted. "Can't we just..."

><br>"Well, you've got legs, don't you?" F-Xander interjected, ignoring F-Willow warning glance. "Use them."

><br>"Oh, it's not \*my\* legs I'm worried about," F-Buffy said, her voice turning dangerously calm. She kept her gaze dead-set on F-Xander. "It's our local neighborhood \*cripple\* that I'm worried about--"

><br>"Hey, shut up!" F-Cordelia said hotly, stepping up. "Leave us alone, you little Hollywood bitch!"

><br>F-Buffy yelled back, F-Cordelia yelled back, and soon every Future person was in this mess besides F-Oz, who looked on all of this with a sort of calm amusement. Then Buffy had enough. These people were getting WAY too much on her nerves. "Will you all just shut UP!!!"

><br>Everyone immediately went silent, and then only string of words that was heard was from F-Xander to F-Buffy. He delivered them with calm.

><br>"I don't even know why I bring myself low enough as to argue with a vampire's \*whore\*."

><br>Both Buffy's eyes widened. "\*What\* did you call me?" F-Buffy spat out, barely repressing her anger.

><br>"I called you," F-Xander continued, and no one made a move to stop him, "a \*vampire's\*. \*Whore\*."

><br>"Why you-" And then, in a blur, F-Buffy lunged towards F-Xander in a cat-like position. F-Xander immediately side-stepped her. Yes, he'd give anything to fight her, but he wouldn't dare. No, not after seeing his father hit his mother and himself so many times. Then he would be stepping into his father's shoes. No, not after knowing what Jonathan did to F-Cordelia. He could never hit a woman in front of F-Cordelia's eyes. Unfortunately, he might have taken this thing with F-Buffy a little too far now. Sure, bickering over trivial little things over the phone were fine. The occasional meeting in a ritzy dining hall was fine. Full-blown arguments in court when he was the attorney for a client that was sewing her, and when he was defending F-Cordelia against Jonathan-those were kept under control. Fists had never come into the matter. Unfortunately, this now seemed the only way. F-Xander had been backed into a wall he could drill his way through.

><br>Thank whatever god for what happened next. Just as F-Buffy seemed about ready to catch up with him and he'd really have to fight

her, F-Oz stepped in front of F-Xander. Grabbing her wrist as F-Buffy brought them up to pummel him, F-Oz quickly whirled F-Buffy around and held her wrist behind her back, rendering her useless. For the moment.

><br>"Let me GO, dammit!" F-Buffy exclaimed, and then kicked F-Oz hard in the shin. F-Oz grimaced but didn't let go. "Why does everyone go for the shin," he muttered, trying to get a better hold on F-Buffy. But that momentary acknowledgement of pain had slipped his grasp, and F-Buffy was quickly freed. Not even thinking, blind by F-Xander's cruel comment, she reached out and strike F-Oz hard in the face.

><br>F-Xander moved to grab F-Buffy from behind, but F-Oz was ahead of him. In that moment, his animalistic instincts told him to give her what she gave. So, before F-Buffy knew what hit her, she was down on the floor and with a red mark on her face as F-Oz looked down at his hand, stunned.

><br>As F-Willow quickly hurried to help F-Buffy up and make sure she didn't intend to make mince-meat of F-Xander anymore, F-Oz looked down at his hand in horror. "Aw man, now I feel bad," he said honestly. He looked up at F-Buffy, who was avoiding his eyes. "Hey, Buffy, I'm really sorry."

><br>F-Buffy didn't say a word. She just righted herself up with F-Willow's help, her face burning with shame. Her eyes flicked towards F-Xander, who's face showed no sign of remorse. The flush from her face quickly faded at that. Was it...grim satisfaction that she detected in her former friend's eyes? She'd expect nothing less from F-Xander.

><br>"Can't even fight for yourself," F-Buffy mumbled, the mark on her cheek quickly fading away and the pain lessening. Sure, there were many bad things about being a Slayer, but at least she was able to heal quickly. And do her own stunts.

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>F-Xander kept silent. <br>

>"Hey, are we going to be able to get to the library without you guys breaking out in anymore fights?" Willow asked. F-Xander and F-Buffy turned to look at her. "Well?" she prompted. Begrudgingly, they shook their heads yes, F-Buffy rolling her eyes in exasperation while doing so. "Good. N-now, let's get going." <br>

>At that they started down the road to the library, which luckily was only halfway into town. The Future Gang walked in front: F-Cordelia, F-Xander, F-Willow, F-Oz, and F-Buffy far away enough so that she looked like she was part of the group, but not. Behind them, Willow and Oz walked together, and right next to them, Xander and Buffy.

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>"I can't believe you called me that," Buffy whispered to Xander.

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>"Me!" Xander hissed back. "That was not \*me\*. That was future me. And I think I'd have a damn good reason to call you...what he called you." <br>

>"Don't you mean future Buffy?" Oz corrected. Xander shot him a look. <br>

>"Right." <br>

>Willow was watching the major cuddling that was going on between F-Willow and F-Oz. "Well, um, we can see that, uh, Oz and I are pretty...ok, and that Xander and-" F-Xander and F-Cordelia were gripping hands tightly and walking together in a rhythm "-Cordelia have made up." F-Cordelia shot a curious look at them, and Willow, mistakenly thinking she heard her, focused on the ground. <br>

>"Well, I think that's nice," Oz commented. "Everything turns out

nice." <br>

>"No, not nice!" Xander insisted. "I seem to be having a serious egg about Buffy, and I see no reason why." <br>

>"Yeah, there's no...foundation," agreed Buffy. <br>

>"Well, it is the future," Oz contemplated. "Things have happened to them that haven't happened to us. Major things, probably, if it led, uh, Xander to call you a-" <br>

>"No need, no need to elaborate," Willow quickly interjected. Oz sent her an apologetic glance, which she smiled at. A little bit of the sadness around Oz's eyes disappeared as she grinned. Then he looked away, and Willow look down at his hands, which were in his pockets. What she'd give to have those hands in hers. "No need at all. <br>

>"Think we should ask them what all this is about?" Willow suggested. <br>

>"No," Buffy said quickly, "bad idea. Giles said that knowing about the future would make us change it, even if we didn't mean to." <br>

>"Yeah, that would happen," Oz agreed. <br>

>They were silent. Then Xander looked towards Buffy. <br>

>"You know, I apologize...for what he said," Xander said, a lopsided grin on his face. Buffy smiled uneasily. She knew it wasn't F-Xander just being an insensitive male. She had heard what F-Xander thought of her...there had to be a good reason. <br>

>What is was, she didn't know.<br>

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>Due to the fact that was the world was going to end, Giles was in the stacks researching furiously. Cursing to himself that he did not have the Silver Slayer with him, he sprinted across the library to call a contact in Germany. Hilda DeGard knew everything about slayer prophecies, and Giles had often had to resort to calling her up and pleading for information, although he told none of it to Buffy or the 'Slayerettes'. <br>

>Ah he picked up the phone and began dialing the digits, he looked up to see F-Faith rummaging through F-Xander's shopping bags. Giles cleared his throat until F-Faith looked up at him. "Should, uh, be going through those?" Giles asked, fully aware of how frightened he was of this slayer. F-Faith was also aware of that. <br>

>"Believe me," F-Faith said, turning back to the bags, "Xander and I are very close. He won't mind at all if I go through some of his stuff, as long as I don't break anything. I'll just open something or two, and then give it back to him. 'Course, he'd have to settle with hot items." She stood up and held up what she had been looking for. "Ah, now for the CD player..." She walked away from the bags and to the bookcase, where she grabbed her younger self's CD player. "Just where I left it," she said to herself without a hint of humor in her voice. <br>

>As F-Faith was busy sitting down at the table and placing the CD in the CD player, Giles listened patiently to the ringing of Hilda's telephone. {Does she have an answering machine?} Giles though letting his mind drift. {I don't remember her having an answering machine. I hope she has an answering machine....bloody pick up the phone, Hilda, I know you are there!} <br>

>He didn't realize it, but F-Faith heard him speak the last aloud. Grinning as she turned the player on, she mumbled, "Lock up the women and children, townspeople, the Man in Tweed has drawn the last straw!" Hardly gut-busting, but it amused her as she settled back to listen to Hellmouth and tried not to think about the dog, who had

fallen asleep by a pile of books back in the stacks. She had a sneaky hypothesis about the dog being here, and she didn't like it all. <br>

>Giles was about to hang up with a great deal of pent-up fury when there was a click on the other end. "Hallo?" said the wonderfully feminine voice of Hilda DeGard. They had trained together, along with others, to be Watchers. Unfortunately, Giles couldn't remember any of the others. Hilda tended to overshadow others in his mind. <br>

>"H-hilda?" he asked, trying to sort his thoughts after they were pushed out of his mind and replaced by a mental image of Hilda and him and the night before their official initiation as Watcher. Too bad she had later told him that what happened was a mistake, that she wasn't attracted to the opposite sex. She now lived very happily with a woman named Frieda. "Is that you?" <br>

>"Rupert!" Hilda cried delightedly. "Nachdem alle jene sich Jahre Sie entscheiden, mich anzurufen? Was ist die Gelegenheit?" <br>

>"Yes, Hilda, it has been a long time," Giles agreed, fumbling with a coat button. Then he reached out for one of his books and pulled it closer. "The occasion," Giles sighed, "is that I need some information on an apocalypse. Check for the year 2015." <br>

>"Was, sind Sie planend, zu gehen die Zeit, die zur Zukunft reist?" Hilda teased, but Giles could hear ordering someone to get her--egads, yes, it was "The Silver Slayer"! <br>

>"Er, ah, no," Giles stuttered into the phone as he listen to the flipping of pages in Germany. "You can rest assured that there is no time travelling to the future involved. He looked up at F-Faith, who was completely into the rock music and not paying attention to the lyrics. The music was so loud that he could hear strain of it from his side of the library: <br>

>"A cry for help, a silent tear <br>A whispered secret, hidden fear

>The past is gone, present remains <br>Tomorrow brings, the glorious pain

><br>Tormented dark, but in the light

>Unbearable pain, scratching at eyes <br>All inner visions show the truth

>This pain of mine, I want to lose <br>

>Let it out: how simple it sounds <br>Let it out: when lost will I be found...?"

><br>The song was so haunting and being sung by a woman with an mesmerizing voice, one that demanded attention and admiration. Giles was caught up in the song, but was quickly grounded as he heard Hilda pick the phone back up from where she had placed it.

><br>"Well, yes right here, love," she said, switching to English. She always did that when she meant business; her native language was reserved for personal purposes only. "There's a beautiful poem here, absolutely beautiful, if you didn't know what it was about. Seems absolutely horrid once you know the meaning of the text."

><br>"Thank you, Hilda," he said, meaning it. Then he cleared his throat. "You don't mind faxing it to me, do you? I haven't a pen or paper nearby."

><br>"Of course you don't, Rupert, all men are too lazy to get up and get anything." Her tone was light, and she knew she was not in "women-rule-men-suck" modes. "Besides, darling, I was planning to fax it to you anyhow. I'm losing my voice: too much yelling at my assistant, Anita. Someone should teach the child the alphabet, really. Can't file for her life." Sounds of the fax machine. "It's on it's way, Rupert, dear. Now, is that all you will be needing?"

><br>"Yes, that's all," Giles said. He paused, a little too long.  
"Goodbye, Hilda."  
><br>"Feel free to call me anytime, whether it regards to work or  
life, Rupert dear."  
><br>"I'll be sure to." They then exchanged cordial goodbyes, and  
then Giles hung up feeling strangely empty. The song that F-Faith was  
listening to was near the end, and Giles stopped to listen to it  
before he went over to the fax machine.  
><br>"I wish I'd die, or fade away  
>Let no one know, I'd go away <br>I'd be alone, pine silently  
>I act so well, the lie they'll see <br>  
>Am I dead, or am alive? <br>Wasting time, so soon I'll die  
>I realize know, I've asked for this <br>Such a small part, will not  
be missed."  
><br>And then it gave way into the chorus part, and after that, an  
impressive guitar riff. The song was still haunting, but now it was  
also disturbing. The person was probably in a deep depression when  
they composed the song, but it was disturbing in a way that it caught  
your interest. When F-Faith was done, Giles wanted a chance to listen  
to it.  
><br>{Wait a moment...I am interested in that noise? Strange things  
certainly are happening}  
><br>Giles shook the idea away from his head as he went into his  
office to check his fax machine. Yes, there it was, the prophecy.  
F-Faith had only remembered the part that had rhymed, not the rest of  
it, which was written in ancient Aramaic. Giles would have trouble  
translating this, so he went back into the main part of the library  
to get a book to help him.  
><br>This time F-Faith was listening to a new song, and bobbing her  
head slowly. Giles listened from the stacks:  
><br>"No longer can I try to bare this  
>Cruel hate for things which we share <br>What have I done, what have  
we done to  
>Have me fear that I'm losing you..." <br>  
>Giles plucked the book that he need off the shelf and opened it to  
the correct page. Then he held the fax up to the book, looking  
between the two and trying to translate it. <br>  
>"We've let our love for each other down <br>No longer trusting with  
raw emotion  
>My soul bleeds for you, I want to die for you <br>Would you die for  
me?  
><br>I loved you while you were haunted by the darkness  
>Did you miss the light in me, your light begins to falter..." <br>

>The text was quickly unfolding its mysteries. It was explaining why  
this time-travel was happening, and what was to come of  
it..."Eureka," Giles whispered to himself, letting his lips form into  
a small smile, although what was to come off all this was no humorous  
at all. <br>  
>"You are so cold and so distant and so gone oh what I would give for  
<br>One more night with the light that was so bright when it was in  
you  
>I would give all I have which is none nothing to give nothing to  
receive <br>The light is dimming and drawing far  
>What did you see in me? <br>  
>I loved you while you were haunted by the darkness <br>Did you miss  
the light in me, your light begins to falter  
>I loved you while you were haunted by the darkness <br>Did you miss  
the light in me, did you see the light in me?"

><br>Giles came up behind F-Faith just as the singer of the group began to fade into a repetition of "Love is forever." He reached out to tap her on the arm, and F-Faith took off her earphone and calmly turned towards him. "Find out how to avert the apocalypse yet?" she asked in a bored tone.

><br>"Well, no," Giles said, taking off his glasses. "But, I have found out more of the prophecy."

><br>"And that helps us how?"

><br>"Well, it will help you, Xander, Willow, and...the others, to get back to your time."

><br>"Good. Is it definite, the way that we'll get back? You can do it? Soon?"

><br>"Uh..." He rubbed the bridge of his nose with his spectacles. "I'm not entirely certain it will work. The text is extremely difficult to interpret--"

><br>"So you interrupted me for nothing," F-Faith said, coming to the conclusion. Then she sucked her teeth and put back the headphones on, going back to observing the book. "Tell me when you have something set in stone, and you can read and understand that something."

><br>Giles sighed. Then he settled his glasses back on his nose and turned back to go into his office. He wished, as he did many times before, that he had never been destined to be a Watcher. But he might as well deal with it, and deal with it, because he should practice what he preached to Buffy.

><br>And if this text hinted at the right thing, then he better practice hard enough not to get Buffy killed...

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><br>It was a relatively short walk to this "library," that Faith was headed too, and Jonah was completely quiet. He had only a vague idea what a vampire slayer was and did, but he feared he'd somehow upset or insult her by asking her about it. Faith, on the other hand, seemed to not mind his silence a bit, and pretty much ignored his very presence. She didn't acknowledge him until she stopped suddenly.

><br>Jonah almost ran into her, because he had been closely making sure that his bare feet did not step on any stones in the sidewalk. He stopped himself just as he was about to plow himself into her shoulder. "What, why are we stopping?" he asked her, stepping around so that he could look her in the face.

><br>"Library," Faith said, jutting out her chin and pointing to something behind him. He looked over his shoulder, and saw that they were in front of a high school. He could barely make out the name that hung over the front doors.

><br>"Sunnydale High," Jonah mused, and then suddenly remembered it as Buffy's high school. This was certainly a hidden message that his subconscious was sending him in a dream. Because, surely, this was a dream. He could never, for an instant, believe that this was real.

><br>He mentioned nothing of this recognition of the name to Faith, and she didn't ask it of him. Instead, she started walking towards the back entrance to the school, the one that Giles always left open. Jonah followed her without any more questions.

><br>As she pushed the door to the school open, Jonah caught her profile in the moonlight. The cut on her face that had been bleeding was miraculously healed. Jonah turned away from her and looked up at the moon. Almost full.

><br>No wonder.

><br>"'Ey, you coming or not?"

><br>Jonah snapped back to attention and shook his head before he looked at Faith. She was in the building already, impatiently waiting, looking like she as going to slam the door in his face. He wasn't about to think that she wasn't going to do. He quickly stepped into the building and winced as the door slammed loudly behind them. "Don't worry," Faith said airily. "No security guards, no nothing. Just the gang is here."

><br>"Gang?" Jonah inquired.

><br>"The good guys, don't worry," Faith said as they came out of the little room and started to walk down the hall. Just a few feet away were a set of double doors with the words "Library" in capital letters atop the doors. "We're the ones saving your ass day after day after day after day. It gets tiring, the hours and the nightlife suck, but you learn to deal."

><br>"I'd imagine," Jonah said in an attempt to be sympathetic. Faith glanced at him, snorted, and then looked away.

><br>"You don't know anything about it," said Faith as she pushed open the doors to the library, and they stepped in.

><br>Jonah let his eyes rove around the walls and the ceiling of the library, in the way that men did when they didn't really want to see what they were being led to. Then his eyes settled on the room, and he noticed the man dressed in tweed who was walking to a table. Faith cleared her throat, and the man in tweed looked up with an expression that was one of engrossment in his work, and then a comical shock. "Ah, um, Faith? May I please ask who your visitor is?" the man stuttered.

><br>"He ain't mine," Faith said, sauntering over to the man. "Just picked him up, seems to have fallen out of the sky--"

><br>And she stopped as F-Faith came out, munching on an apple that Giles happened to have in his office and bopping her head to the music, letting bits of the apple fall to the fragile pages of the book that she was reading. F-Faith looked up at her younger self, Faith looked at F-Faith, and while F-Faith stood there calmly Faith recoiled and jumped backwards.

><br>"The hell...!" Faith said angrily, and then whipped a stake out of her clothing. She waved it at Giles. "Explain, and fast!"

><br>Giles opened his mouth, but F-Faith beat him to it. "Damn, I'm all skin and bones," F-Faith said, swallowing another bite of apple. Then she looked Faith up and down again. "Mostly skin, hell yeah. Nothin' 's changed."

><br>"What's she talking about!" Faith said, getting frustrated, and she vented it by showing anger. "Explain \*now\*."

><br>"Oh, I'm your future self," F-Faith said breezily. Faith gave her a shocked look. "What, you couldn't tell? I practically haven't changed." Then, as Faith fell into stunned silence, F-Faith turned to look at Jonah. Her expression clouded. Giles noticed the shift.

><br>"Do you recognize him?" Giles asked, wondering if this future-visiting anomaly was exclusive only to their little circle. He shifted the position in his chair so that he was facing away from Faith and Jonah as looking upon F-Faith.

><br>F-Faith's lips curved up into a little smile, reminiscent of Willow's. "Nope," F-Faith said, "never seen him before in my life." Giles looked at her with a disbelieving expression. "What? Never had! What, do you think I'm lying?" She said the last word with a stifled laugh, enough to set him on his toes. No way would he call her a liar, not after those stories he'd told her. Not like she'd do those to him, but she did so enjoy "skinnin'", and it would be interesting



to see what kind of man Giles really was. He wasn't that older than her anymore; although, age had prevented her from relationships or one-night stands in the past.

><br>Jonah could not tell if she was lying. He'd never had any contact with this woman, although she and her leather-wearing self would certainly be something that would stand out in his memories.

"I've never seen her before," Jonah put in hopefully.

><br>"You're \*me\*?" Faith asked, not getting past that.

><br>"Yup. Get over it," said F-Faith matter-of-factly.

><br>Faith shrugged. It was her alright.

><br>"What's your name?" Giles asked Jonah, reaching for his glasses again.

><br>"Daly. Jonah Daly," he said, and then realized how much like one of those action-heroes he sounded like. "Um, do you have any idea how I got to this...Sunnydale, and how may I get back."

><br>"He's working on it right now," F-Faith snapped, "so lay off him. He's just one man, and I don't have any intention of doing grunt work. So if you want to find a way home, go get a book off the shelf and research."

><br>Jonah was taken aback, but F-Faith just raised one eye coolly. Jonah looked at Giles, who seemed to be destined to become their self-appointed mediator. "Um, yes," Giles said. He put his book down and stood up, walking over to Jonah. He shook his hand and then introduced himself. "My name is Rupert Giles. Er, I suppose you already know that something paranormal has happened to you." Jonah nodded. "Well, if you'd just take a seat, perhaps I could explain some of this to you..."

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><br>"Ouch!"

><br>Wincing, F-Willow leaned on F-Oz's shoulders and made him stop as she bent her leg up to grasp her foot. "I stepped on another stone," she grumbled, checking to see if her foot was bleeding yet. Yes, but those were teeny-tiny superficial cuts. She wished she'd worn her slippers when she and F-Oz'd gone out on the porch, but it was too late for that, now. Besides, it wasn't like she was thinking she'd be trudging through the districts of a town that was even standing to this day.

><br>"Are you okay?" F-Oz asked, and she smiled at him. "I'm fine. Just all these darn pebbles in the walk," she explained.

><br>Her little trip had gotten the attention of F-Buffy, F-Xander, F-Cordelia, and the past people. F-Cordelia poked F-Xander in the ribs and whispered something in his ear. He nodded and stopped, too, and took off his shoes.

><br>"Here," he said, handing one shoe over to F-Willow and taking off the other in the process. "I know they're kinda big, but..."

><br>"But nothing," F-Willow said, placing the shoes on the ground and slipping her bare feet into them. They were big. "Thanks. A-are you sure you don't need 'em?"

><br>"Please, I'm a guy. I don't feel pain: at least, I don't admit it when I do. Besides," he shrugged, "what's the worse walking without them can do?" He smiled wryly. "Ruin my back?" He shook his head and his hair shagged around his face and into his eyes.

><br>F-Willow shrugged and slipped feet into shoes. She took a test walk and was rewarded with a large \*clomp\*. She giggled, and then made an "oof" sound as someone ran into her.

><br>F-Willow whipped around to come face-to-face with herself. She

opened her mouth to apologize, took one look at Willow's somewhat frightened expression, and then burst out laughing, leaning on F-Oz and partly stepping out of F-Xander's shoes. F-Cordelia look at her.

><br>"Willow?" she asked, "are you going insane? 'Cause remind me to be elsewhere?"

><br>F-Willow shook her head fiercely. "No, I'm not going insane." She took a step back from Willow and then giggled again. "Nope, I'm just realizing that I've run into myself." F-Xander raised an eyebrow. "Well, I thought that was funny, and a little abnormal. I mean, we all don't trip over our own two feet like you do."

><br>F-Xander grinned. "Oh, that's right. The rest just drive cars off the road and into trees 'cause they were too busy-"

><br>"Hey! \*You\* try driving in platforms! Those things are slippery on the pedal, ya know!"

><br>"I drive?" Willow asked, surprised. F-Willow turned back around to face her. "I-I mean, well? 'Cause I have anxiety issues, you know, fear of being behind the wheel..."

><br>"Oh, don't worry, you're not afraid," F-Willow assured her. "Usually it's the people riding with me that are afraid."

><br>Willow raised an eyebrow. "Yeah," F-Xander put in, "Willow likes to hit all the curbs."

><br>"She has quite the track record," said F-Oz. F-Cordelia nodded, and \*she\* was the bad driver.

><br>"Oh-oh, when Cordy says you're a bad driver, you're a baad driver," Xander said, punching Willow lightly on the arm. Willow gave him a friendly scowl, while F-Cordy reach out and poked F-Xander in the stomach.

><br>"Ouch, Cor! What was that for!" F-Xander cried out in indignation, although it really hadn't hurt. F-Cordelia crossed her arms over her chest. "You made fun out of me," she explained.

><br>F-Xander rolled his eyes. "That was little me! Little me made fun of you! You know, soon people are going to stop wondering why I'm so damn masochistic." F-Cordy stuck her tongue out at him, and F-Xander crossed his eyes back. They each gave little, we-have-a-secret smiles to each other.

><br>"Anyway..." F-Buffy said, making forward gesture. "Oh," F-Willow noted, and then everybody started walking again.

><br>"So, hi!" F-Willow said to a suddenly shy and timid Willow. They were walking side by side now, with F-Oz looking Oz up and down.

"Whatcha think of this whole deal?"

><br>Willow's mouth opened once or twice on its own free will before she was able to utter a sound. "Um...strange," she admitted, looking at her feet as she walked. She also snuck a peek at her double's borrowed footing, and had to grin at the size. "What do you think?"

><br>"Well, I think that if I was in your position, then I'd feel pretty darn strange, too," F-Willow agreed. Then she paused and her forehead wrinkled. "But in a way, I kinda \*am\* in your position..." She trailed off, her tone and facial expression one of bewilderment.

><br>"You're right..." Willow continued, and both Willows looked at each other with wide eyes. Then they both turned quickly away and all was silent.

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>Silent until two members of the group suddenly felt as though they had been thrown into ice-cold, needle-sharp ice water. At the same

time, F-Willow and F-Oz reached out to hang on each other's shoulders, and what should have sent them to the ground made them stand up in a sort of huddle. F-Oz reached for his stomach as though he were about to change, but he didn't. <br>

>"What? What?" said four nervous Generation X-ers nervously. <br>

>All three's faces were drawn tight and pale. "It's...evil," F-Willow explained. <br>

>"Horrific...it's just everywhere..." F-Oz said, at a loss to explain it all. <br>

>"Hey! It's the old alma mater!" F-Xander said enthusiastically, and pointed ahead of them. <br>

>Sure enough, there was Sunnydale High shrouded in darkness-they were at their destination. It looked so ominous, large windows seeming like dark, watchful eyes, and for the people who knew what lay under the foundation, it was especially haunting. <br>

>"Gee, that's strange," F-Willow said. "How come we've never felt...well, all this bad juju before?" <br>

>"Juju?" Xander asked, bewildered. <br>

>"Well, we felt it because our senses are heightened by our 'conditions', a-and supernatural things can just sense other supernatural things. I, uh, think," said F-Oz, reasonably calm. <br>

>"Well, I'm more supernatural than a witch, and I can't feel it," F-Buffy pointed out. <br>

>"That's because you have no feelings," F-Xander said simply, and received glares from everyone. He just shrugged and continued to stand tall, giving everyone an innocent "What?" look. <br>

>F-Buffy just scowled at him and said nothing. She really didn't want to get into another fistfight with him, and she had no doubt that F-Xander's word-brawls would trigger another. <br>

>"Um, can we just go before I have to break up something else and hurt Buffy again?" F-Oz said, looking pointedly but somehow also deadpan at F-Xander, who just gave another one of his shrugs. Then he turned to F-Buffy. "And I really am sorry about that-" <br>

>"Aw, it's ok. No grudge," F-Buffy said, waving it off. F-Oz nodded, and F-Buffy gave him a small smile, which F-Oz did not return; the smile quickly became a frown.<br>

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>"Nicky, it's dusty in here," Julie complained as she walked behind Josh. "Dusty and tight and \*dirty\* Nicky, it's \*dirty\* in here. I don't like it. It smells like socks, \*old\* socks. When does it end?" <br>

>After some argument, the kids (well, Nicky, mostly) has decided to leave the door to the secret hallway open. Es had been terrified that while they were in the hallway, something hidden in the halls would crawl on in after them, and had wanted the doors closed. Julie had argued hotly with her, telling her that if they closed the door that they might get locked in, and if the hallway led to nowhere or something scary then that would be a problem, wouldn't it? Es had grown silent, and Nicky had opted for the open door, because while he didn't believe in boogies, he did believe in dead-ends and locked doors and suffocation. He doubted that the secret hallway had air-conditioning. <br>

>"Julie, will you stop complaining?" Josh told his twin sharply; he, who had just been complaining to Nicky that they had been walking over. "You're such a \*girl\*," he continued, spitting the word out like it was a curse word. <br>

>"Yeah, I'm a girl," Julie said, stopping to turn around. She got in

her brother's face, just like Aunt Faith had taught her to. "Gots a problem with that?" <br>

>Josh thought for a moment about picking a fight with her-you could see the contemplation in his eyes-but he decided not to. "Nope, no problem," he said in a jerky, nervous way. Then he brushed passed her, with Julie stamping her foot in indignation and shoving past him to get in semi-front again. <br>

>"Will you guys be quiet?" Nicky told the two, and Annie and Es, who were holding hands (Josh and Julie were REALLY unhappy about that: who knew this girl? She just came out of nowhere, and nothing good came out of nowhere) turned around to stare at the twins. Es shook her head slightly, and Julie was about to make something of it when Nicky cried out: <br>

>"Hey, look! I think I see a door up ahead." <br>

>The kids all craned their neck and then hurried down the rest of the hallway. "Think we'll end up in a secret garden?" Es said hopefully, thinking that since strange things were happening it ought to go all the way and at least all the way into one of her favorite books. <br>

>"Don't be stupid," Josh snapped, knowing not a thing of which Es mentioned. Rather than retort, Es kept silent, polite, and just hurried up, making Annie skip a few paces before she caught up to speed. <br>

>Sure enough, the hallway did end a few paces later, and there was a door at the end instead of a wall. The door looked clean and shiny and new, very different from the rest of the grimy corridor. Annie gave a little jump of excitement, understanding that something good and clean would probably lay behind this door and maybe she could stop walking so much. She still had tiny legs unlike everyone else. <br>

>Nicky reached for the doorknob and gave it a twist. It didn't budge. {Uh-oh}. "I think it's locked," he said in a small voice. <br>

>"Locked?" Es asked, her voice rising to an entirely new octave. <br>

>"Yeah," Nicky admitted, and then looked at the frightened faces of his step-brother and step-sister and half-sister and the other girl. He bit his lip guiltily and tried the doorknob again, with more force. This time it opened, albeit with some difficulty. There was an audible sigh of relief from everyone. <br>

>"See?" Nicky said, his own voice more relaxed. He swung the door open, and light-not sunshine, though-flooded into the hallway. Nicky and the rest blinked at the sudden change in light. They all reached up to shade their eyes with their right hands (although Es did it with her left) and then, as the world stopped changing into strange colors, they brought them down and saw who was waiting for them. <br>

>She wasn't pretty, but kids were pretty cruel in their definition of pretty so that might not made it written in stone. She was very gaunt, and very pale, and was wearing very dark lipstick. She had big, round, hypnotizing eyes. She was wearing a bright red lacy shirt that showed her cleavage, and a long leather skirt that their (step)mother would definitely classify as "trampy" or "goth." She had high pointy boots that Es had seen Mommy wear home when she came home in costume from a movie she was shooting, something called "Ghost Kiss" that Elisabeth Sarah wasn't allowed to see until she was much, much older. <br>

>As Nicky shoved everyone else behind him, the thin lady cocked her head to the side in a childish manner. "Lost little lambs," she cooed, a glint in her eye. She raised her eyebrows and Nicky and

clapped her hands. "Would like something to eat? There are cakes...cakes left over because Miss Edith was naughty, a naughty little girl." She looked straight at Es. "You're not a naughty little girl, are you?" Es shook her head "no" solemnly. "Well," the lady said, whirling around. "Come, children." <br>  
>Es started to move, but Nicky gave her a look that said "What do you think you are doing?" and she stayed put. The lady noticed that no one was following her, and she turned around, and motioned kindly to the children. "Come on," she soothed, adopted a low, hypnotizing voice. The children couldn't help but be captivated. All, even Nicky, began to follow her out of the small room they had found themselves in and into another hallway. <br>  
>"Is it safe to go with you?" Nicky asked in a breathless voice as they walked down the hallway. Obviously his protectiveness and fear showed over the lady's magick. He looked up into those big, deep eyes that looked down at him with a strange devilish warmth. <br>  
>A smile played around the lady's blood-red lips. She was so pale..."Of course it is, Nicholas," she said in a mimic of his breathless voice. Nicky was completely under her spell. "I don't bite." <br>

## 8. Default Chapter Title

"...and now we come to your current situation."  
><br>For most of the conversation, Jonah had at first been skeptical, then dumbstruck, and then again skeptical again. The things the man were saying were of science fiction and fantasy stories. The fact that he was here instead of back home, though, had made him at least absorb what the man was saying. At the first mention of Buffy, though, Jonah had almost wanted to jump and tell this Rupert that he might be talking about his wife. But for some reason, he didn't. He just thought he should wait until the explanation was done.

><br>And now it had finished, and while the Faiths past and future laughed about something, Jonah's mind was in a turmoil. All laws of science demanded that he not believe a word of what this man had to say, but what else was to explain his sudden appearance in this town, and in 1998, mind you!

><br>God, what was he to think?

><br>As Jonah's view of reality slowly crumbled to his feet, Giles looked at him closely. He knew he was hiding something: some time in his explanation Jonah had opened his mouth as if to say something, and then closed it again. He wondered what it was, but he had many things to wonder. He wondered about Faith and F-Faith, who were enjoying themselves by telling raunchy men jokes. He wondered about D-Giles, about where the dog had gone and why he had come back in time. He wondered if his future self would come through, or if he was dead in the future, from natural or unnatural causes. He wondered if the others had met their future selves.

><br>When he got those answers, he'd fell a hell of a lot better.

><br>"Are you...certain what you said was true?" Jonah asked slowly and carefully, as though he wanted to make sure of what he was saying, lest it sound to ridiculous to him. He arched his eyebrows at Giles, and he suddenly felt sympathetic for the man. He was obviously just trying to live a normal life and then \*boom\*, here he was.

><br>Giles nodded sagely. "I'm afraid so. I'm dreadfully sorry you had to be transported into this mess, not of your own accord, but you

are going to have to-"

><br>Suddenly the library doors opened, and a young blond came sashaying through. Jonah's mouth dropped. {No way...} he thought, his eyes looking her up and down. He had a perfect memory and 99% of the time he was never wrong. This was, without a doubt, the Buffy Summers he had met when she had been going under the name of "Anne."

><br>Jonah made some unrecognizable mouth noises, and then clammed up. The blond was already speaking to Giles, unaware of any one else in the library.

><br>"Okay, Giles, the Future People are right behind us," she started, marching in all business-like while still looking soft and feminine and vulnerable. Right behind her came three more teenagers, one boy with a slight built and brown hair, and the other two, a boy and a girl, looking like the preincarnations of Willow and Jeremy Osbourne. Jonah's eyebrows creased in frustration, and this was an emotion he was not enjoying. Where had sense taken a vacation to?!

><br>"And..." the girl who looked a heck of a lot Buffy turned around and stared at the double doors. "I could pick a less cruder way to put this, but..." she turned back to Giles. "I can't. Us as adults are pretty fucked up, Giles."

><br>As Giles was gathering himself to answer, Buffy's eyes settled on Jonah. F-Faith had quieted down to see the reaction, and Faith followed in suit.

><br>Buffy was beyond manners. She felt no control over her situation, and she wanted to be in control very much. This kind of helplessness was beginning to really get on her nerves. She was the \*Slayer\* for goodness sakes! Maybe if she could demolish something she could release some tension. Maybe burn down a gym or two.

><br>"Who are you?" she asked Jonah bluntly, giving him a glance. Jonah made several unidentifiable mouth noises and just looked this girl up and down. Buffy sighed and took her attention away from the man, and looked towards the people that had followed her in, and then again made the mental travel to the door.

><br>Now there could be shouts heard. Xander winced and sort of hunched over. Then the doors flew open, and in came one fiery blond.

><br>"No, \*you're\* the stupid one, Hyena-boy! Now don't go giving me shit like you've never done anything wrong in your life! Want me to point out your mistakes, although that until me a fucking centuries of lifetimes to tell them all! Jesus \*Christ,\* Xander, you're no saint! Why do always think I should be one, then?"

><br>At that, she flounced around and spun on her bare heel, ignoring the pain. She glared at her younger self for a moment, and then looked over at Giles and Jonah. She passed over his face, and then took a double take and recognition lit up her face. "\*Jo\*nah!" she said, her voice full of relief and breathless.

><br>Jonah was still trying to regain his speech. He'd barely stood up when F-Buffy went barreling into his arms, and he closed his eyes and pulled her tight. He needed something familiar in this world, and oh god, she was wearing that perfume again, the one that got him every time. It was in her hair along with her shampoo and it was everywhere, and Jonah wanted to get lost in that scent and not open his eyes and have to face whatever something else had gotten him into.

><br>But he had to, so he did. He let his eyes pass over the young ones and saw F-Willow and F-Oz there, she in her nightclothes and F-Oz in the clothes he slept in at night. Both of them passed dim

flickers of I-think-I-know-who-he-is-I'm-not-sure looks and then remembered they'd been on the soundtrack for some of his movies. Then he flicked his eyes toward F-Xander, and the biting malice he saw there he did not want to bear for long. He looked last at F-Cordelia, who gave him a faint twist of a smile, as if to apologize for how F-Xander was acting.

><br>"Buffy, do you know what's going on?" he whispered into his wife's ear, bending down and casting a wary eye around the room. Buffy just burrowed deeper into the crook of his arm, ignoring the question. "Buffy," he warned, "this is no time to play games." He felt as though he were chiding Es, and strangely enough, he felt like Buffy had been reduced to the point of needing him to treat her like Es. At least in these surroundings.

><br>"Oh, hey, how'd he get?" Willow asked, looking at Giles while Buffy continued gaping at the fact of her hugging another man. {What about Angel...} Buffy thought. {Oh God, please just let that be a friend!}

><br>"Um, it's rather strange, and er," Giles looked towards F-Xander. "I think I might have to talk with our travelers and compare the two stories."

><br>"Jonah," F-Buffy said, her voice soft and muffled. Jonah answered "yes" and bent his head down further. She lifted her face up and met it with his. "You've got to promise me that you're not going to be angry about anything you find out while we're in this mess, do you understand?"

><br>"Buffy, I'd promise you anything, but I need to know what you're worried I'm going to be angry over before I decided what kind of emotion I'm going to express. I don't want to promise I'm going to be okay with anything and then have it turn out to be a lie, whether I like it or not. You know me pretty well, so if you think I'm going to be angry about whatever I might find out, then in all respects, I most probably will." He saw Buffy's face fall. "But don't worry, sweetheart. I could never stay mad at you for long." Keeping his voice low, he looked over at the future people. "Now, before I ask you anything else, do you mind explain why Xander and Cordelia are here with you, and why you've got two rock stars tagging along too? And just don't mind me if I care to not register my surroundings or the people dressed like it's the '90s or that fact that they're saying it *\*is\** the '90s."

><br>Buffy shrugged. "I am definitely not the one to explain all this." Then she noticed the eyes on the two of them. She turned around and gave everybody her who-are-you-looking-at glare. F-Xander rolled his eyes.

><br>"Can we get on with finding out why the hell we're all screwed and leave the two match-made-in-hell alone?" Another jab from F-Cordy, but he ignored it and walked past everyone else, pulling two chairs out. F-Cordy shrugged and sat down next to him as F-Faith suddenly engaged in a conversation with F-Xander.

><br>F-Oz started towards the table, but F-Buffy stopped F-Willow before she could go to. "Who's he?" she hissed, darting her eyes towards F-Buffy.

><br>F-Willow swallowed nervously, and blink several times before allowing herself to speak. "That's your husband, Buffy." Then she slid out of Buffy's tight grip with an unnatural ease and hurried over to get herself a place in F-Oz's lap, not giving Buffy another look.

><br>Everyone else took their seats somewhat dumbly. Nearest to the stacks were Faith, F-Faith, and Xander. Across from them were F-Xander, F-Cordelia, and F-Oz with F-Willow in his lap. Next to F-Xander and Faith was Oz with Willow in his lap, and next to F-Oz,

F-Willow, and Xander was Buffy. Giles, Jonah, and F-Buffy were left standing.

><br>"So, what's the sitch?" Buffy asked, her eyes still on her future self and future hubby.

><br>"The Talking Encyclopedia says it's the apocalypse," said F-Faith nonchalantly, as though she were talking about the weather.

><br>"Hanson's taken over Microsoft?" F-Xander asked innocently, and F-Cordelia and F-Willow snickered.

><br>Buffy looked towards Xander. "At least you haven't lost your sense of humor," she told him. Xander looked at Buffy. "It seems as though I haven't lost \*anything\*, Buff," and Buffy looked at F-Xander. Yup, Xander was right...except whatever they had as a friendship seemed to have gone away.

><br>She'd be damned if she didn't find out why.

><br>There was a sudden shuffling from the stacks. There was a golden glint of fur, and then it came hurtling towards Jonah and F-Buffy like the wind.

><br>"Giles!" F-Buffy cried out, confused more than relieved as she knelt down to give her pet a hug. D-Giles happily licked her face, and then scrambling out of her arms to go get some from Jonah. Jonah reached down and patted his dog's head like a robot, and ten D-Giles fell to his owners' feet as F-Buffy stood up again.

><br>"Um, no," Giles said, getting back to the point. He took off his glasses, wiped them, then placed them back on his nose. "A-actually there is this poem that foretells, well...the death of the Slayers."

><br>"Both of us?" Faith asked. Giles shook his head no. "Only one?"

><br>Another shake of the head. "All four."

><br>"Four?" Jonah asked before anyone else could. "But we only have two here, Faith and Future Faith..." He trailed off as he saw the looks on everyone's faces. "What? I'm new here."

><br>He felt F-Buffy sucked in her breath sharply, and Jonah backed a way a bit so that he could see her clearly. "Remember what I was afraid that you might be mad about?" she asked, her voice small.

><br>Jonah creased his eyebrows yet again, and it took a moment before it dawned on him. "Oh," he said, his voice odd. "Oh." Then he looked at F-Buffy. "Boy do you know me, 'cause you're right." Now he was hurt. "Why didn't you ever tell me this before? Were you even planning to tell me? I mean...I never lie to \*you\*."

><br>"Wait!" F-Buffy said, reaching out for him. She hated seeing him upset at her, and what she hated more was seeing him hurt by her. "I-I can explain." She paused. "Kind of." He took a breath. "You see, I didn't tell you because..."

><br>She stopped and turned towards F-Xander. Everyone did the same. He opened his eyes wide and held up his hands in defense.

><br>"What? Why is everyone looking at me? I have nothing to say! Do I \*always\* have to say something?"

><br>"You usually do," Jonah said, his voice dry. F-Xander shot him a look. "B-but obviously you don't now, so," he turned back to F-Buffy. "I'm waiting."

><br>F-Buffy bit her lip. "You see, I didn't tell you because really, I'm kind of not the Slayer anymore."

><br>"Ch-yeah," F-Faith said, leaning back in her chair. F-Buffy did not turn to face her. "You're just a little traitor, running away from all yer problems." Now Buffy did turn around. "Oh yeah, get angry at me, you little whore. I'm the one whose doing \*your\* job for



\*you\*. I'm the one with some sense of responsi\*bi\*lity-"  
><br>"Who are you calling a whore?" F-Buffy asked angrily, turning completely away from Jonah and putting her hands on both hips. F-Faith took that as a challenge and stood up, putting her hands in the same position.  
><br>"You."  
><br>"Looks who's talking. You make Sharon Stone look like a saint."

><br>"Fuck you, Buffy," F-Xander interjected, standing up and looking over at F-Faith. She shrugged and sat down, leaving the rest up to her friend. "You're the whore." He looked right into Jonah's eyes, and the man did not flinch. F-Xander had always tried to get at him through F-Buffy, and what could he say that was possibly new?

><br>"Does he know about Angel?" he asked F-Buffy, never taking his eyes off her husband.  
><br>F-Buffy's eyes widened. "You wouldn't dare," she hissed.

><br>Buffy jumped up and stood next to her older self. "Yeah, you'd better not."

><br>"Oh, I'd do it." He continued on regardless of the two deadly blondes. "You think your wife's a saint, huh, Jonah? Do you know about Angel, do you know about the other things she's done? Do you know about Jenny? Do you know about Jenny's uncle?"

><br>F-Buffy put her hands to her ears. "Stop it," she warned, closing her eyes. Buffy gave her an incredulous look.

><br>"Do you know about Theresa? Do you know about Kendra? Do you know about-"

><br>"\*Stop it\*!" F-Buffy yelled, unable to take anymore. A little tear leaked out from under one closed eyelid, and then Jonah took her into his arms. The past people looked up at F-Xander to see his response. He calmly sat down, not caring at all about Buffy's crying. Next to him, F-Cordelia was shaking her head, but made no move to berate him. F-Faith had a smug look on her face that Faith was currently copying. F-Willow and F-Oz were studying their hands and the floor with rapt attention.

><br>Before anyone could say anything, there was a sudden, tinny ringing. Everyone looked around, uncertain as to what it was. It continued, ringing as a phone would. In fact, it sounded-

><br>"It sounds like a cell phone," Oz said cautiously, unsure as who to direct it to. The future people all looked at each other.

><br>"It's not mine," Jonah said right off the bat. "I didn't get a chance to grab mine before I got here."

><br>"Not mine," followed Xander. "All out of batteries. Anyone who was supposed to call me was to use Cordy's number..." He trailed off and all eyes focused on F-Cordelia.

><br>"What?" she asked, suddenly self-conscious. The ringing came started up again, sounding ominous and urgent. "Ohhhhh," she said, getting it. Her hand was halfway to her back pocket when she froze. "But how ..."

><br>"Perhaps your number is registered here and now as the number of someone else," Giles offered, as the phone continued to ring.

><br>"Just pick it up and see who it is," F-Xander told her.

><br>F-Cordelia shook her head and grabbed the slimmed-down cell phone that looked completely different from a cell phone of the 20th century variety. She tossed it on the table in front of F-Xander. "I'm not touching it," she told him, as though he had told her to

pick up peat moss and carry it around.

><br>F-Xander sighed and picked up the phone, unfolded it, and pressed a button before he brought it up to his ear. He listened for a few seconds, and then went dead pale.

><br>"What?" F-Cordy pressed, scooting closer to him. "What? Xander, what's wrong?"

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><br>Natalie Monroe stood in front of the kitchen counter, running one sweaty hand through her mussed hair. Another sweaty hand gripped the old-fashioned telephone she kept in the kitchen, the nostalgic one that reminded her of when she was in her twenties in the early 90s. It took all her willpower to keep combing back her hair with her fingers instead of jabbing in the number of the police station again. {They told you Natalie they told you already...they've got them in their files, they've got them and in 24 hours good lord if they don't come back then they'll try tracking them down...oh god oh god, the poor children are out there somewhere and their lost and crying and oh god they could be killed or raped or maimed or cut up in little jars or they're going to find just their heads...Jesus Christ-}

"\*Pick up the goddamn phone Cordelia\*!"

><br>She just finished her shout when there was a click, and then there was connection. Natalie didn't wait to hear if it was Cordelia or Xander. They were both the parents, and they would \*kill\* her oh god if they didn't find the children...

><br>"Cordelia Xander oh my god I don't really give a shit as to who is on the other end of this goddamn phone and Jesus Mary Lord the children have been kidnapped and poor little Nicky and Julie and Josh and little tiny Annie they're \*gone\* they've been taken and I've called the police but they have to missing 24 hours and I don't know where they've gone I took a nap for a few hours and Nicky didn't wake me he always wakes me but he didn't this time so I overslept and then went downstairs and everything was in its place just like except there were crumbs in the living room and the game the twins were playing was just abandoned and there are fucking \*scorch marks\* on the fucking floor and Jesus Christ Cordelia Xander they've gone missing and I've done nothing and all I've good and please don't please don't do anything to me and don't go insane because I'm going insane enough for the both of us!"

><br>Natalie took a deep breath that shook with unshed tears. "This can't...this can't..." She trying to say "This can't be happening" but it just was not coming on.

><br>There was silence on the other end. "Christ don't tell I talked to fucking \*no one\*!" She yelled into the phone. She hadn't used this much profanity or called on so many Holy People since she was nineteen years old.

><br>"No, no, I'm here." She heard Xander's voice flood the receiver, and she had to hold it away from her ear. She could now hear noise in the background, and Cordelia's voice asking what was going on. She heard Xander swallow and the sound was extremely magnified.

"N-Natalie...are you sure?"

><br>"Dammit, Xander, I may have to wear glasses but I'm not blind or deaf and the children aren't here." She broke sobbing. "I've been taking care of children since I was eleven and this has never happened to me! I just don't understand it Xander they disappeared and nothing can just \*disappear\*!" She leaned heavily on the counter and let her body go slack, her elbows supporting her frame and the phone just barely dangling in her arms. She felt absolutely horrible and then tried to think about what Xander was feeling.

><br>"Xander, please, I'm so sorry, and I'm going to get into my car right now and search for them, because I don't know what's fucking \*wrong\* with the Connecticut police force and I am going to march down there when I have found those children and demand a policy change. Hell, I'll go to City Hall! I know I'm probably making you even more worried or something but I have no idea where they have gone to they've just \*dis\*appeared." She took another deep breath and her body shook. "Are you have you will you tell Cordelia?"

><br>There was some more silence, but not dead silence like before, because she could hear his steady breathing and Cordelia still asking to know what's going on. "Not right now," she told her, his voice slow and careful. "Natalie, I want you to listen to me. Are you listening to me."

><br>"Half of my brain is," Natalie told him. "The other part of my brain is panicking. Let me switch to the functioning part." She took another breath. "I'm listening."

><br>"Don't you go anywhere. There is absolutely nothing you can do. You don't need the kind of stress to go on a wild goose chase. I know exactly where they are."

><br>"You do?" Natalie asked hopefully, latching on to that gem of a sentence.

><br>"Yes, Nat, I do. You remember that big case I'm doing, the one that's cause me to partner up with that other firm, that ritzy one that has a name seventeen words long?"

><br>"Yes, Xander, I do. The Firm of Stokes, Springer, Gonzalez, Simonian, and Laski."

><br>"Do you know what the case is about?"

><br>"No. You've told me nothing and nothing's in the paper. Everything's very hush-hush but everyone knows it's a big deal."

><br>"Right, because it is a very big deal. Dangerous stuff...er, it has to do with Sakash Arven, conditions in China, the Libyan government, and...more top secret things I cannot tell you about now."

><br>"Oh," Natalie said, but just her mouth moved, with no sound coming out. She cleared her throat, which turned into a coughing fit. "Oh, I see," Natalie finally managed, "but Jesus Xander, that means the kids have been kidnapped by whoever your firm and that other firm is fighting against?"

><br>"Correct. There is danger-" the background voices had long ago faded, and Natalie realized he must have moved somewhere more private "-here, but the States have people who handle this kind of thing. Hang up after I finish, and call the police. Tell them that you have found the children and there is no need to worry, that they were hiding somewhere in the house. You have checked the house, right?"

><br>"Yes, they're...they're gone."

><br>"It's going to be okay, Natalie. It's not your fault, it's not my fault..." another pause "...it's not anyone's fault. And the kids are going to be safe, and they'll be back, I promise."

><br>"They're not even my kids and I'm more nervous then you are." Natalie meant it so sound as an attempt at a half-hearted joke, but it came out more like she was accusing him.

><br>"That's because I know they're going to be safe," Xander said, his voice still soothing. "Now I want you to hang up and tell the police not to worry. Cordy and I will stop shopping and get right to alerting the correct authorities. By the way, Natalie, we've got you a wonderful gift."

><br>"Thank you, Xander," she told him weakly, "I'm sure I'll enjoy whatever you get me. And promise me you're going to find those kids."

><br>"I promise." And then Xander hang up, and as soon as the little beep sounded, Natalie put the phone down, not caring that she put it incorrectly in the cradle. She stumbled out of the kitchen and went to take a quick shower before she called the police.

><br>She was already upstairs when there was a click from the phone and then the operators voice.

><br>"You have tried calling...555-6738....That number...555-6738....is currently out of the service range. Please try again. You have tried calling..."

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><br>In the past, shaky at first from receiving a call from the future, then shaky to discover that his kids were missing from a very well-protected home under strange circumstances. And he was 99% sure what those circumstances were, because as Natalie put it, no one just disappears.

><br>So no F-Xander wondered how freaked out F-Cordy was going to be about the fact that their children had been sucked into the past and were either wandering around someone in Sunnydale or already kidnapped, killed, or maimed by something preternatural or stuck in the limbos of time. F-Xander would rather do anything else than go out there and tell F-Cordy that her children were missing. It was no lie that mothers were very protective. Just a year ago F-Cordy had parked outside Wolf's Camera to pick up a roll of film, and left the four kids in the van. She had not properly put the car in park, so as she was entering, the car began to roll away. She had left her pick-up ticket in the car, so she hurried back out to find her car rolling away with four very scared children screaming out of the windows. She remembered nothing of what happened next, but onlookers had reported that she had sprinted after the car, pulled open the unlocked driver's door, jumped in and stopped the car before it had gone into traffic.

><br>F-Cordy could be superficial and egotistical and might not care too much about people or things, but try and mess with her kids, hell, try to mess with Julie and Josh too, and she was as much as match as F-Willow or F-Oz could be.

><br>That's why he didn't want to go out there and tell her. That's why he'd rather stay here and keep thinking about how much he didn't want to go out there. But he did go back out there, out of the stacks, walked down the stairs, looked at F-Cordelia, motioned for her to go in the stacks, and as she obediently brushed past him, he looked over at Jonah. He glared back, and with good reason, too. F-Xander just quelled the urge to deck the man and looked at Jonah with a serious face. Jonah mellowed out.

><br>F-Xander took his arm and turned him away from Buffy and the rest of the gang. "Listen to me," he said, trying to remember that he was doing this for Elisabeth Sarah, and that she was just a kid and did not have to be held accountable for the fact that her parents were a bunch of jerks. "The woman who takes care of my children called me-" he held up the cell phone to Jonah as though it were proof "-and told me my kids have gone missing. Now before you ask why the fuck it should be your problem, too, it is, because in all likelihood if \*my\* kids have gone missing than \*your\* kids as deep into the shit as mine are. Now." F-Xander put the phone in Joanh's hand. "Call whoever can check on your kid or-oh yeah, your kid stays home alone now, right? Yeah, she's seven. Okay, call the house. If she doesn't answer, call

someone who can check-"

><br>"-I know what to do, I'm not mentally challenged-"

><br>"-up on your house and your kid and if she's not there, then we've got some serious problems." He looked Jonah up and down. "Tell Buffy only if you think she can handle."

><br>"If I can handle what?" F-Buffy asked from behind the men. She could not hear what they were saying, so F-Xander just rolled his eyes and looked at Jonah out of the corner of his eyes.

><br>"Do the world a favor, man, and don't tell the bit-Buffy."

><br>Jonah narrowed his and nodded, and thought this was something serious if F-Xander was stopping himself from insulting his wife.

"Okay. Are you sure this thing works?"

><br>"Yeah, but it's going to be a hell of a bill, goddammit. I don't know if my phone company covers trans-dimensional calls."

><br>"Split the bill with me." And that was that. No pointed "What, you think because you're some hot-shot director that you have more money than me?" or "What, you think I don't make enough fucking money to pay my bills" or anything else resembling the bitter form of F-Xander. Jonah shook his head to wake himself up from whatever nightmare he was in but he was awake, and he was following F-Xander into the stacks, and he was telling F-Buffy what was going on while F-Xander was trying to explain to Cordelia.

><br>Why was this happening to him?

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><br>Meghan Brewer lived in a big mansion with a dog, a cat, several tropical fish, and one bird that was constantly freeing itself of it's cage and running into walls because it was clipped, poor thing. She was 34, looked 27, and living alone with countless lovers who knew nothing of each other and she was happy. She liked the way she was living. She supposed that when she entered her mid-life crises she would want to settle down but right now she was enjoying her freedom.

><br>Party or no party, she went to sleep promptly at 1:00 every night, unless there was a special awards ceremony where she was being awarded something. Even then, if she had won nothing by 1:30, she was the hell out of there asking Buffy or Erika or Yvonne to pick up her award for her, or hell, even the guy she was flirting with that night. Then she'd sleep like a log, nothing waking her up, until the sunrise, where she always woke up even without her alarm clock. She had been doing this routine since she was eight years old and her body had since been conditioned.

><br>So, she was awake and flipping through the latest tabloid magazines seeing if the Enquirer had indeed doctored those photos so that it would look like she was secretly having Matt Damon's lovechild. I mean, really. Please.

><br>Just as she had reached the article, the phone rang. Meghan reached one long arm over her head and picked up her cordless. She pressed the correct button and tucked it under her chin and began to read. "Hello, this is Meghan Brewer. I don't do interviews, autographs, or windows. Who the hell are you?"

><br>"It's Jonah, Meghan. I need you to do me a favor."

><br>"Jonah, hi! How's Buffy and Es? They've cut her hair yet, right? I mean, really, only music people have hair that long. Really out of fashion. What's the favor?"

><br>"Still with the long hair, Meghan." Meghan uncrossed her legs

and leaned deep into her white Italian leather couch. She looked down at the article and reached on hand up to stroke her ear-length blond hair. "And I need you to get up, go over to our house, and check if Es is there."

><br>"I'm busy, babe. Sorry."

><br>"Meghan, don't make me laugh. You're never busy. That's what I love about you."

><br>"Is your wife there, Jonah?" Meghan laughed. She loved the easy banter they shared, and she loved being neighbors. "Is she hearing you say this to me?"

><br>"Yes, she's here, and she's hearing, and she's also telling me that it's pretty damn urgent to drag your gorgeous butt off that gorgeous couch of yours and go over to our little shack and check up on our kid."

><br>Meghan clucked her tongue. "Boy, Jonah, you can be so persistent sometimes. How does Buffy deal with you?" She was dressed, but barefoot, and as she got up the couch, the Enquirer slipping to the floor and dirt where it belonged, she walked over to the entranceway and slid into her flats. "What's up with the little star? Finally let her in one of them movie roles the other directors are pestering you about? Want her to wake up early?" She turned the doorknob and stepped outside, closing the door behind her. She waved to the couple that lived across the streets, the DiCaprio's, and they waved back through their living room window. "Where are you, anyway?"

><br>"You ask to many questions. Just check, will you?"

><br>"Fine." Meghan cut through the little walkway they had in their front yards and ducked into the Daly front yard. "You've got to cut your grass."

><br>"Not my job. It's Paolo's. Besides, Es likes it long, and I live my days to serve her."

><br>"What about Buffy?"

><br>"She has me for the nights."

><br>Now she was at the front door. She sighed and went over to the windowsill, and peeled back what looked like a regular piece of the wall and instead peeled back a little hole in which a key rested. She got the key and smoothed the fake piece of the wall into place. "Did you install an elevator? I'm going to kill myself walking up and down three freakin' floors."

><br>"Try. Not to," he added hurriedly. Meghan turned the key in the lock, laughed, and entered the house.

><br>She walked up the stairs, past the second floor, and made idle chit-chat so she wouldn't have to hear the hallow echoes the slaps of her soles against the marble made on the steps. She finally got on the third floor and paused outside Es' room. The place seemed so deserted.

><br>"I am now entering...the Twilight Zone," Meghan said, trying to shake off her uneasy feeling. She thought, but could not confirm, that Jonah said something that sounded like, "I'm there already."

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><br>"No, Jonah, she's not here. Why, is something going on? Should I be worried?"

><br>Jonah's tongue was heavy in his mouth. "Yes, dammit, be worried! Be so worried that you'll have a heart attack, because that's what I feel like having! You won't believe what's happening to me over here, and I can barely handle it! Just imagine what my kid's gonna go

through...in fact, imagine it for me so I don't have to think of all the horrible things that could happen to her!"

><br>Well, that's what he wanted to say. What he did in fact say was, "No. No cause to be alarmed." Then he did the necessary casual good-byes and hung up. Then he turned to F-Buffy, who's face was already as pale as a vampire's. F-Xander and F-Cordelia looked on, and for the moment, F-Xander almost looked as though he was interested as to how Jonah and F-Buffy were feeling at the moment.

><br>"She's not there," Jonah said, his voice hoarse. F-Buffy sighed, closed her eyes, and slumped against her husband. Jonah put one comforting arm around her, and handed F-Xander another. Both guys were trying to keep it under control, and F-Buffy and F-Cordy were trying their best not to cry. F-Xander took the phone without another word and then looked at F-Buffy.

><br>"Are you...okay?" he asked, and it sounded forced and fake to everyone who could hear it.

><br>"You don't have to pretend," F-Buffy said crossly. She looked at him with icy green eyes. "I know you don't give a flying fuck."

><br>"Yeah, but that doesn't mean \*I\* don't care," F-Cordelia put in. She let her eyes touch on Jonah. "And if I care about the disappearance of my niece, then Xander cares about it. Right?" Xander nodded. F-Cordelia then put on a little smile. "Dance, my puppet, dance!" she giggled, and F-Xander allowed himself a smile and drew her close.

><br>"You know I can't dance, Cor."

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## 9. Default Chapter Title

Sometimes people thought that she was dumb just because she could not speak. Nope, she was nothing but dumb. She was as smart as a three year old could be. Sometimes even smarter.

><br>The only person who really recognized this was Auntie Willow. She knew just how smart and gifted Annie was, and she would often argue with her Mom and Dad about where Annie should be placed in school or the ways Annie should be taught to communicate with others. In fact, Auntie Willow so cared about Annie that she had given her a little charm necklace, with something called a "rune" on it, and she wore it all the time underneath her clothes. Auntie Willow said it was enchanted and that it would bring her good luck and other stuff. She never let anyone else see it, and though she had given her brothers and Julie rune necklaces, they didn't \*always\* wear it like she did.

><br>Since Annie could not speak and express her opinions, she liked to listen to the opinions of others. She was a very good listener, and sometimes Mom or Dad or Nicky or Julie or Josh would tell her things they'd never tell anyone else because she could never tell anyone. Woe to them the day she learned sign language and learned to write. Sometimes her mind would wander while people talked to her, or talked around her. She learned to take everything in slowly and analyze it all, and so she knew a lot of things people usually missed because they were too busy flapping their mouth. The only thing about her muteness was that when she wanted something, she almost never got it because nobody understood what she was trying to communicate.

><br>So as they walked down the halls, all entranced by Drusilla's spell, Annie's mind wandered. Sure, she was holding on to Elisabeth

Sarah's hand and walking along without refusal, but that because when you were a shy and timid three year old that wasn't at all opinionated and self-righteous, or did not even know or care how to be like that, you usually just did what everyone else told you to do. But, while everyone else was just walking, Annie noted where they were walking.

><br>There were no windows, Annie had noticed. Everywhere she had been there were windows. Windows were so you could escape from the house if need be, she had been told. Or something like that. There was no escaping from this house.

><br>And they had been walking for quite a while. This was a big house. And there was no wallpaper anymore, the beige wallpaper with the little flowers that looked out of a story book. They had gone down stairs, not upstairs, and everything was turning gray and looking like a sidewalk, but a shiny, polished sidewalk with dirt on it. The floor did not have a rug.

><br>Some more stairs. Her feet were tiny and she had to keep from tripping. Es helped her as much as she could, but there was not enough compassion squeezing in from the cover of Drusilla's spell. The stairs were short this time. Annie was almost certain there would be no more stairs and that there was a ground floor now. Yup, there were windows. Boy this place was old, it smelled old, it smelled funky like eggs that were old. Annie wondered if it was spring soon and if they were gonna clean like Mommy and Ms. Natalie did around then.

><br>Wow, there were not only windows, but there were doors. And ooh, looky, a fireplace, and an old couch. And now they were going into a corridor...no! They were taking another flight of stairs and they were going down into a place that was dark but illuminated with a red glow in the far end. It reminded Annie of a dungeon and she was almost certain there was a dragon at the end and his fire was causing the red glow. She started crying, and Drusilla stopped the entourage.

><br>Annie was wiping her nose with her free hand when Drusilla walked over to her. She bent at the knees and tilted her head sympathetically, her mouth forming a thin crescent and her wide black eyes looking like deep pools that Annie could get lost in. "Now what's the matter?" Drusilla asked, in her strange, childish voice.

><br>Annie let out some more tears and then told her what was wrong. "I want to be with my Mommy and Daddy and I don't want to see the dragon. I want to go back to place with the windows, can I have some windows?"

><br>Drusilla clucked her tongue. "Sunshine, Mommy doesn't care if you want to see her or not see the dragon. Daddy's given you all to me, and if you're good, we'll play games with cakes and tea and I'll let you hold Ms. Edith. Hmm?"

><br>Annie sniffled and blinked her tears. Drusilla wiped them away with her long, bony fingers. "Now, now, no more tears or our appetites will be spoiled. Then everyone will be very sad." Annie nodded, and her sweaty hand slid out of Es'. "Chin up." Drusilla stood up and then picked her up in her arms. Annie did not like the way she held her at all. She wanted to be with her Mommy and did not believe a word she said. Her Daddy \*cared\*, but there was no way of telling Drusilla that. "And on we go."

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><br>Now Es was pretty bright and though she was not the oldest yet, since she'd be Nicky's age in a year, and she thought she was



thinking seven already. This Drusilla, though, was something else. She knew deep down that she was a stranger and that it was bad to go with her, but for some reason she was following her and wanting to do everything that she said, and was kind of upset that Annie was being favored.

><br>In front of her were the twins, who had that same jealous gleam in their eyes. Then there was Nicky. He was quivering, and she \*knew\* Nicky was trying to fight whatever was going on. He was a very brave kid, and Es thought that when she grew up and out of her all-boys-are-icky stage she might think he was kinda cute. Although now the thought disgusted her, she knew already that if they were in danger, Nicky'd get them out of it. Good thing to, if they were gonna see a dragon like the one Annie was crying about.

><br>They were walking again, and Es suddenly wanted Annie's hand. She was getting frightened. It was cold down here and she could hear noises now, talking noises, and it was getting much darker. It was dusty and dirty and she could feel her allergies acting up. She scrunched up her nose and tried to hold back the impulse of sneezing by biting on her lip and pushing back her two upper front teeth with her two bottom front teeth. It worked, but her eyes welled up and she was afraid Drusilla would get angry at her if she started crying. So she put her head down and stared at her feet, not wanting to call attention to herself.

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><br>Julie looked at Josh and Josh looked at Julie. They were queasy, like they were going to be sick. Something strange was going on, but it hurt their eyes to look at each other too long. They turned their attention to Drusilla's back.

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><br>Drusilla always liked the little ones. They were so young and plump and their blood was always fresh and invigorating. Too bad that these little children would not be for her. Metaike had specifically told her they would be sacrificing the children to the one she called the Prince of Chaos. She had told all of them-her, Spike, Angelus-that if they fulfilled this prophecy, they could start time all over again so that the mortals would never gain control of the world, and the four of them would be bequeathed with the power over all of them, as they would be viewed as the Creators. Everybody was joyous, and everything would be joyous. They just needed the sacrifices...

><br>Metaike had been very secretive on the sacrifices. She did not say why they were needed, just that they were needed. And although they were accessible in the year 2013, they needed to be brought into the past so that they could complete chaos. Ah, chaos! The word was music to her ears. Sweet music that would soon be played...

><br>They had brought the mansion with them, the one she, Spike, and Angelus had used way back when they were going to destroy the world by means of Acathla. But that very night the Slayer had come to ruin their plans, and her Spikey had become as yellow-bellied as could be, teaming up with one who oozed with good intentions. But he had won her back, had become the old Spike just for her, and by the time Angelus came around again they were bound enough so that they could take another in, and everything was blood and peace.

><br>The mansion was large. Right now they were in a basement, and what the simple child thought was a dragon was just the glow from the

extra floor a few of their minions had carved out for them, for Metaike. It was dirt and earth and the small bathing pool had been set in and in there was the most delicious thing \*ever\*.

><br>Even better than baby's blood.

><br>Now the littlest one, Annie, was holding on to her neck and her face was buried in Dru's shoulder. Annie's neck was pressed up to Dru's chin, and she could hear the pulsating rhythm that her tiny little heart made as it pumped blood. She wanted to grab the child and snap her neck as she took it in her mouth, sucking all the life of her in mere seconds. It took every fiber of her being not to do that. After all, she did not want to get her Angelus mad.

><br>She did not want to upset the plan.

><br>Ah, they had arrived to the door to the lowest level, and the light that seeped through the cracks was the brightest of dark red. She could hear the children whimper, and it thrilled her into ecstasy. "And now for the fun," she laughed, pushing open the door with one hand.

><br>The room the minions had dug was about the size of a ballroom. There were a series of doors on the far left wall, doors that led to various dirt rooms, sewer tunnels, and dirt corridors that snaked around the town. Well, none of them were certain about the corridors, because they had snaked around the Future Sunnydale, which was drastically different from the Sunnydale they were in now. How times change for the worst-for the humans-and the better for the demon population of Sunnydale.

><br>After the Party, as Dru and Spike liked to call it, or "The Burning Time," as Angelus liked to call it, Sunnydale had fallen rightfully into the hands of the demons. Every evil being came to that spot like moths to a light, and once and for all they were allowed to take freely of the power that was the Hellmouth. Unfortunately, the Hellmouth was completely sealed, and there was no way to open it back up again. Luckily, the exotic power still shot out from it, accessible to all.

><br>For feeding, the demons and vampires and other dreadful things made their way to the surrounding towns and brought back food to share with others, and sometimes even human playthings. There became a sort of hierarchy among them, and Angelus, Dru, and Spike ranked highly in the system when they frequented Sunnydale. But the town had rapidly become dull to them, and they had sought out new towns and new blood, but always coming back for the power the Hellmouth offered, and being well received by the dark community.

><br>But now they would be the highest, and it would be their Sunnydale all over the Earth, and chaos would reign along with them...

><br>She laughed throatily and stepped into the room, the children following. The door slammed behind them, and the children jumped and Julie began to cry. Her spell was broken, but so be it. They were here already.

><br>The place was absolutely silent. Drusilla walked lightly into the middle of the ballroom, twirling happily along with the child. She felt excitement and anticipation bubble up inside of her, and she could almost see it bubbling out of her mouth and eyes and pores. Annie just tightened her hold on Dru and shoved her neck closer, and she was unable to contain it anymore. She vamped out from the heartbeat against her neck, and while Annie was oblivious, the rest of the children saw. Josh and Julie began to cry and grabbed on to each other, Es hugged herself, and Nicky's eyes turned into large, ice-blue pools.

><br>"Monster," he whispered, his voice full of awe and terror. Then her remembered Aunt Willow and Uncle Oz, when the children had found

out they were werewolves by accident, and that they could shift-shape at free will, and contort their face into all sorts of things. Then they had explained that while they were "monster," they were \*good\* monsters. They had gone on to tell them that there were some bad monsters out there, and some looked like \*this\*. At \*this\*, Auntie Willow or Uncle Oz would half-morph their face into something terrible, with a ridge in the middle of their face and yellow eyes instead of the silver of a werewolf and, and two long fangs instead of a mouthful. It was horrible.

><br>It was Drusilla.

><br>Dru grinned and flashed her fangs. "That's right, little boy. Want to play?"

><br>Nicky's eyes widened. Annie had lifted her head up to look at Drusilla, and she was still and frightened. Nicky wanted nothing more than to grab her out of her arms, but he knew he couldn't. Instead, he stood in front of Julie and Josh and Es, and shook and wanted to pee in his pants because he knew he was trapped, and that Annie was probably as good as dead by the way Dru was leering at him.

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><br>Metaike; her name sounded so soft, so innocent. Once, on a whim, she had passed for a young human child and gone by the name of Kaity. How sweet the parents were, how peaceful-even in their death when she had ripped out their hearts and laid them so properly in their bed, as though they were going to sleep. Those two kind people should have known better than to take a mysterious child home from the streets.

><br>Her real form was less appealing. Due to a nasty encounter with one of the first Slayers an uncountable eons ago, Her face had been scarred to the point where it could barely be called a face, and it did not heal with age. Her beautiful face had been burned away to a charred black mask, skin twisted and dragged to place where it should have never been. Her eyes were barely visible, and her nose was but two holes in her face. Her mouth was a fleshy black scar that split open when she felt the need to talk. Her eyes were a horrible milky white and it looked like she could not see, although her sight was much better than a mortal and most of the Lesser Beings. She smelled permanently of smoke and in the short time she had been in this mansion, it now permeated her scent as though she had marked it. Perhaps she had; Lower Beings were extremely territorial and uncomfortable in any kind of surrounding unless they made it theirs.

><br>The rest of her body was that of a nymph. Full, perky breasts, languid curves in all the right places, legs that seemed to go on forever. Unfortunately, since the body was such a contrast from the head, Metaike often hid her body with the long, Grecian robes she felt comfortable in. As she was doing now, as she lay on her side on the bed, glaring up at the almost-full moon.

><br>"I shun you, Diana," Metaike growled, spitting out the word of a Higher Being as though it were a curse. "I shun you and your kith. But for I could walk under the sun, for I would rather be in the grace of Apollo than in yours."

><br>Saying those words made her feel better, as they did every night. Metaike had a personal grudge against Diana, just like she did with all the Higher Beings, especially the Goddesses. She was once one of them, she was once High before she was cast into the Lower Regions because of her meddling with Time. It was not her place in the Higher Order, but she gone and learned how to control Time regardless of what Aradia, the Highest of All, had told her.

><br>Well, now it was her job with the Lower Beings. \*She\* was a Lower Being, and for such a long time she could barely remember what it was like to be High. She wondered if she really had liked it better. Surely, if she had been High, she wouldn't have been offered this wonderful task.

><br>If she had been High, she wouldn't have a need to take it.

><br>"Cursing the Gods, my beautiful Metaike?"

><br>At the sound of the voice behind her, Metaike smiled. She knew it looked grotesque on such a face, but she could not help it. "Angelus," she said without turning around, in a soft, breathless voice too beautiful for her face. "Has Drusilla arrived yet?"

><br>"Why don't you ask Spike? He's her pet, after all. You know I'm yours and yours only. I only know when \*you\* come and go."

><br>"Which is never," Metaike growled, looking back up at the moon. It seemed to smirk at her. "I'm confined here because I can't walk in Apollo's light and Diana scorns me as much as I do her." Bitterness never fades with age, it just grows stronger; Metaike could move mountains with her bitterness.

><br>She felt a cold hand on her bare shoulder. It touched the tiny line where the carnage of her face ended and her silken skin began once more. It was like an eternal mask that she could never take off, a mask that went right into her skin. "Why do you feel the need to be outside or above when you can spend your nights with me?"

><br>"Because I don't deserve you," Metaike said truthfully, turning around. Her eyes looked down at the floor and she felt the smooth skin of Angelus' taut neck pass her wrinkled, charred skin. A shiver ran through her body. "I don't deserve you."

><br>"Nonsense," Angelus. "You know I only obsess something worth obsessing." Metaike laughed. "It's the truth, Metaike, I swear."

><br>"And I should believe you," Metaike said, looking up to meet Angelus' eyes. They were as cold as steel, and that sent another shiver down her spine. She both hated and enjoyed how he reduced her to nothing by just being his gorgeous self.

><br>Angelus felt her lust and slowly took hold on her chin and tilted it up until their lips were bunch inches apart, and he could feel her hot breath against his mouth. Metaike closed her eyes and their lips met, but Angelus kept his eyes open, staring into her face. He resisted the urge to smile at the fact she gave herself to easily to him. He hungrily worked his tongue into her mouth, and Metaike met it and they began to wrestle.

><br>They pulled away when Metaike needed to breath. She smiled as him, and Angelus tried to swallow the fact that she looked like one of his mortal nightmares come true. "I need to know if Drusilla is back."

><br>"Then come into the hall." He pulled away from her and offered his hand. Metaike smiled shyly and slid her hand into his. Together they walked out into the ballroom-size main room, hopefully to see if Drusilla had come back with the children.

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><br>Sure enough, they were there. Metaike wanted to laugh because things were beginning to fall into place. She tightened her grip on Angelus' hand and stared at the terrified little children. The baby

that Dru held in her arms was squirming and whining in a high-pitched noise that was quickly becoming annoying.

><br>Slowly, the children noticed that someone knew had entered the room. They turned tear-streaked faces towards Metaike and she exactly what their reaction would be.

><br>Or so she thought she did. She was taken aback by the young girl's rude comment.

><br>"What the heck happened to your face?" the little girl asked with disgust, for the moment forgetting that she was terrified.

><br>Metaike felt her heartbeat rise as she grew angry at the child's careless words. She growled and lurched forward to rip the child's throat out, but she felt Angelus restrain her. She did not want to fight him. "Metaike, don't harm the sacrifices. You told us that yourself."

><br>{That was before the little bitch picked on my face} Metaike said, thinking about the extremely sensitive topic. "You're correct," she said, growling through her perfect set of dazzling white teeth. "But I only said that so one of you wouldn't get carried around and kill them prematurely. Torturing is still very open to those who want to do it the children."

><br>She heard one of them gasp-it was the taller girl with hair as long as Metaike's. "Scared, little girl?" Metaike asked, and the tall girl nodded and sobbed loudly. "You should be."

><br>"Must we lock them up quickly," Drusilla asked, her voice hushed in respect for Metaike, "or can I play with them?" At the end of the sentence, her mouth curved into her twisted, insane smile. Metaike joined in.

><br>"Certainly, Drusilla. Play with them all you want. And if you want, let Spike join in-if you can find him. He seems to be playing hide-and-seek among the tunnels today." She looked at Angelus and they both shared the same idea-going back to Metaike's bedroom. As they turned around, Metaike stopped and looked over her shoulder. "And harm the young one," she said, pointing at the young girl. "Julie. Preferably...her face."

><br>She turned around, and she did not see Josh and Nicky crowd in front of Julie, who was tight-lipped but frightened. Drusilla looked down at them and grabbed Annie's both wrists and she began to pound on her neck. This was going to be fun.

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><br>He leaned against the curved dirt wall of a tunnel, letting his leather-covered shoulder dig into the soft earth. He brought the lighter up to the tip of his cigarette and watched the butt ignite and slowly glow a bright orange. He flicked the lighter off and shoved it into his jeans pocket. He then cupped a hand around the cigarette and then took a long drag, wishing that his lungs still had that old reflex to breath instead of him having to concentrate on it.

><br>He was in the tunnels underneath the imitation second basement of the mansion. He felt safe down here, away from everything and anything that he was pretending to be. As he took another drag of the cigarette, he closed his eyes and savored the moment. After that smoke, he ran a hand over his white-blond hair and looked down the left of the tunnel, to where the entrance was.

><br>He could sense no one coming for him, and the only other vampires were the lowlings that they'd found as soon as they had arrived and set up shop. There were also Angelus and Drusilla several feet above him, and he could feel the oldness of them seeping into

his bones, although he knew he gave them the same feeling. Then there was Metaike, an odd hole. There was no feeling of evil from her, just a smothered tingling at the back of your mind that called for attention but never received it.

><br>Spike gave a sharp laugh and then turned on his heel to face the right. They weren't bothered by his disappearance, since it was expected. He had only been with them for a month, and during the last two weeks he had been extremely reclusive. It was expected of him, and he had enough time to do what he had to do.

><br>He'd also better hurry up and get out of here while he had the chance. Drusilla had found the children; upstairs, ironically. Angelus was planning to send out ten more to the library to pick up the adults, since Drusilla had messed up her incantation over the blood and ridded and sent the previously dispatched set of vampires back to the future. They'd found the remains of the van at the end of the street, and Angelus had been so upset that he'd hit Dru. Spike was impassive, and Angelus had noted to this; for a moment there, Spike had worried that Angelus had been on to him. Luckily, Angelus had been too busy calling back the vampire that he had ordered to go and kidnap his past self.

><br>Now Angelus was just basking in the fact that he had gotten the children, but Spike knew that it would not be much time to spare. The children were an important part of the ritual, but the adults had to come first. Tonight, Angelus planned to capture the most two most important players in the rite-Buffy and F-Buffy.

><br>Spike looked at his liquid watch. He had enough time before Angelus would be done pleasing Dru, wooing Metaike, and having his fun torturing the children. Spike winced. He had to get news to the adults. He needed to tell Xander and Cordelia what was happening the children, although he would try as much as he could to keep Drusilla and Angelus off of them.

><br>He ought to leave now. Spike bit down on the end of the cigarette between his lips, and moved it in a carefree up-and-down movement as he walked down the tunnel. He whistled softly, his voice echoing his head. {I'm going to give them a scare} Spike chuckled silently, smilingly. {Now, if the exit still is connected to the crack in the basement of Sunnydale High, I am going to be just fine...}

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><br>There were soft murmurs coming from the back of the stacks, and everyone that was not including in that private conversation were sitting at the table, studying their insignificant object of choice. Finally F-Willow stood up.

><br>"I'm going to the girl's locker room?" she asked timidly, standing by F-Oz. Everyone turned their faces up to her. "I'm a little tired of looking like a Victoria's Secret Angel. I need shorts or pants. So I thought I'd don some gym clothes and get in the Razorback spirit." She spread out her hands. "Does anybody know where the gym is?"

><br>"I'll show you," F-Oz murmured, looking up. F-Willow grinned at him and they linked hands. "Can I dress you, too?" he whispered in her ear as they neared the swinging doors. F-Willow giggled and shrugged flirtatiously as they passed through and began their walk down the hallway.

><br>"They're so...cute," F-Faith said, wrinkling her nose in disgust. "Blecch." She shivered like she was having a spasm, and then shrugged the feeling off. She leaned back in her chair and called into the back of the stacks: "Hey \*peo\*ple, what the hell are you

doing back there?"

><br>Then F-Xander appeared, his face ashen, juggling the cell phone from one hand to another. "We have a bit of a problem," he sighed, letting his eyes drop to the ground and then back up again.

><br>"Another one?" Buffy asked, shaking her head. Everyone gave her a fleeting glance and then looked to F-Xander for an explanation.

><br>He gave it to them. "We think that more people have come back."

><br>The room was silent. "Who?" Giles finally asked, his voice coming so abrupt that he sounded like an owl.

><br>From the shelves behind F-Xander, F-Buffy appeared. F-Xander gave her a look and for a moment, they didn't look like they'd attack and rip each other's throats out. "Our kids," F-Buffy whispered in a soft voice, and her face felt completely, making her look completely vulnerable. Jonah came up behind her and placed his arm around her shoulders comfortingly, and she subbed her hand along his stomach for comfort and leaned heavily against him. F-Cordelia materialized like a ghost, and then all stood there. F-Xander gave a little shrug.

><br>"We're not completely certain," he said before anyone could rush in with questions. "It's just that no one can find them and well...there's not much a chance that they've all been kidnapped...at least my kids & Buffy's daughter. So...most likely they're-"

><br>"-Running around lost and scared in a dangerous town who's nightlife will \*suck\* the life right out of them," F-Faith finished up grimly.

><br>The parents gave her an incredulous look. F-Faith just shrugged. "Your world's all nice and clean, guys, but mine's based in reality. I'm just stating the facts."

><br>"Kids?" Buffy asked, her voice reaching new heights. She turned to Giles, then to F-Buffy and Jonah, then back to Giles. "Daughter?"

><br>F-Buffy opened her mouth to confirm the fact, but Giles interrupted. "Ah, uh, it might be best if you did not reply to that question."

><br>"Why not?" F-Buffy asked. She reached up a hand and lazily pushed her loose hair back over her shoulder. She cocked her head slightly and gave Giles her full attention, and he realized that while she used to practice these moves so as to be more of an actress than a Slayer, it all came naturally now.

><br>"Um, ah, if you know too much about your future you're liable to change it."

><br>"What the hell," F-Faith grumbled, "it's sucks anyway." F-Willow glared at her. "Hey, I don't do sugar-coating, okay? I live in this reality."

><br>"Which may or may not really be ours," Oz put in, looking at F-Faith. She looked back at him, not understanding. "Well, Giles has explained that there are many dimensions besides this one...maybe you guys come from a parallel dimension that's only somewhat like ours. Maybe this isn't time-travelling but dimensions-crossing."

><br>"He has a point," Buffy pointed out, nodding.

><br>"Oh, that's a bunch of bull," F-Cordelia said with a breezy wave of her hand. They turned to look at her, surprised. "What?"

><br>"How do you know that this is the correct dimension?" F-Xander asked, walking closer to his wife. F-Cordelia's eyes met with his and

she turned her head up to look him in the face.

><br>"Well, duh, we've been in alternate dimensions before."

><br>"Uh," Xander said from the table. F-Cordelia turned to look at him. "Nooo."

><br>"\*Ugh\*, dork's dork, it hasn't happened to you \*yet\*," she said, exasperated, with large and overemotional rolling of the eyes. "If you haven't noticed, we've lived more of your life than you have-being from that place called the future and all-and we know things that haven't happened yet."

><br>"But know they know it's happened and you've violated what Rupert just told you," Jonah pointed out in a nice, easy manner.

><br>"Okay, am I surrounded by morons?!" F-Cordelia said, beginning to get agitated. "Hel\*lo\*, we've got to get it straight so that they," she jerked her head over to the table, "don't send us back to a dimension instead of forward in time. And when the hell did you get on a first-name basis with Giles?"

><br>Jonah was going to retort in a nice enough way, but F-Xander, in a moment of kindness, shook his head furiously. He'd seen F-Cordy get into big fights and absolutely hated calming her down-so of course he was doing this for his good, but he was saving Jonah from having a face full of scratches cause by long, perfectly manicured fingernails.

><br>"Wait, if you guys don't tell them about your kids then how are you going to find them?" Faith asked, looking at Giles. Giles wished that everyone would stop looking at him because the writer was beginning to feel awful by having to be so repetitious.

><br>"Yeah, how?" F-Cordelia worried, and then she latched onto F-Xander much in the same manner as F-Buffy had to Jonah. "I mean, they're out there, just like Faith said-"

><br>"Hey, don't listen to me, I didn't mean to cause anyone unease," F-Faith soothed. F-Xander looked at her with a raised eyebrow. "So it's hard to break old habits, okay?"

><br>"How are we going to find them?" F-Buffy asked, her voice getting smaller. "If anything happened to Elisabeth Sarah...I'd kill myself."

><br>"Take a number; there's a line," F-Xander told her, and F-Buffy gave him an incredulous look.

><br>"Jesus Christ, you jerk! Something bad like this is happening and you're still putting me down?!"

><br>Xander shrugged, completely unsympathetic. "Hey, I have a system, okay? One part of the brain panics, and the other part of the brain constantly insults you."

><br>Buffy smirked and stepped back from Jonah, crossing her arms. "And the other 3/16 just lay there and die, huh, Xander?"

><br>"No. That part imagines me doing cruel and awful things to you that often end with your death, preferably a long, painful, and bloody one."

><br>The smirk was wiped off Buffy's face and replaced with a grimace. "Sweet."

><br>"But Faith has a point," Cordelia tried again. "We have to find them-and don't \*anyone\* try to contradict me." She glared at F-Xander, but her face soften when she saw the slightly hurt look on his face. "Sorry, it's just that...they're so young, and...we need to find them no matter what."

><br>"Hey, you know," F-Faith said, standing up and placing her palms on the table top, leaning down upon her arms. "I'm bored, I'm from



the future, and I'm the Slayer." She quickly clipped "the" while staring directly at Buffy, making it perfectly clear that she was \*the\* Slayer; not just \*a\* Slayer. "I volunteer to look. Besides, if I can kick some vampire ass, it just might lift my, ah-"

><br>"Dampened spirits," F-Xander mumbled half-heartedly, knowing that F-Faith has paused just for him. She gave him a warm smile, the kind reserved only for him and a certain other man, and then it disappeared in another nanoscond.

><br>"I'll go now," she announced, without waiting for anyone to say she could. She tensed her muscles like F-Willow and F-Oz had shown her, and jumped up on the table. The momentum and the push of her legs sent her flying over the space between the table and the double doors, so that she landed right in front of them. Whipping her hair over her right shoulder, she turned around and waved goodbye with four of her fingers, a stake already in hand. Then, with a little grin at seeing the slightly miffed expression on Buffy's face, she sashayed her way out of the library.

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>AND THIS IS WHERE I ABANDONED THIS STORY TWO YEARS AGO. OK?

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End  
file.